

DECEMBER 1, 2008

The American Conservative

PLANET Obama

Is the World's Faith Misplaced?

Theodore Dalrymple



Hillary's Cabinet

Vince Flynn's Wars

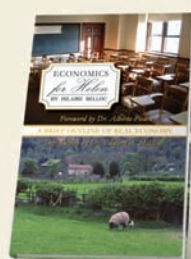
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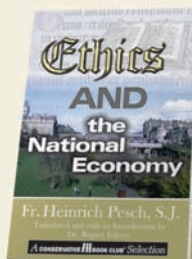
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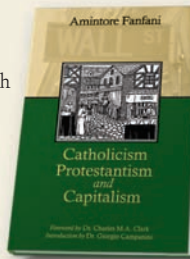
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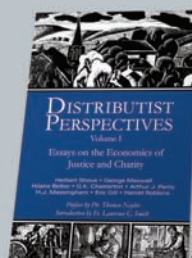
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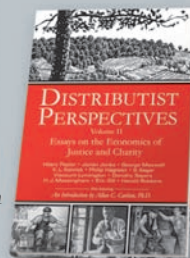
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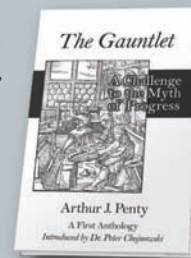
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[BELTWAY]

JOE THE DEMOCRAT

Which battles will President Obama pick? What entrenched powers will he appease? Whom will he challenge? Despite their November victory, Democrats do not have a particularly impressive record over the past eight years. They enthusiastically endorsed every rotten initiative that President Bush sent their way: war in Iraq, torture, passing out mortgages to people who could never pay them off. One can find Democrats and Republicans who were right on all these issues, and we'd like for Obama to recognize and elevate them. But that is not what he's doing.

Instead, Obama stage-whispered to Senate Democrats to spare Joe Lieberman the embarrassment of giving up his Homeland Security Committee chairmanship. This is a senator whose mission has been to provide "bipartisan" cover for the Bush disasters. Were it up to him, we'd already be at war with Iran. But otherwise, he's a "good" Democrat, always willing to spend taxpayer dollars.

Democratic voters in Connecticut, sick of his warmongering, tried to oust Lieberman in the previous election cycle and did cost him his party's nomination. But he became a cause célèbre on Fox and among the neoconservatives and slipped back into the Senate as an Independent.

Lieberman endorsed John McCain, making the focal point of his opposition not Obama's social liberalism—he's fine with that—but his lack of bellicosity in foreign policy. This web of issues will come up soon in Obama's presidency: Will he change course in Iraq? Engage Iran? Move toward an Israel-Palestine peace and an Israeli withdrawal from the occupied territories? Will he re-evaluate America's entire approach to the Mideast? Or will he conclude that's an area best left to "bipartisan" types like Lieberman and try instead to ram



through socialized medicine? We'll be awaiting the answer, but his early appeasement of the Connecticut senator isn't cause for optimism.

[ECONOMY]

HOME EVASION

Good news for millions of Americans wearily chipping away at their mortgages, even as property values continue to plummet. Under a new government program, anyone with a loan guaranteed by Freddie Mac or Fannie Mae and little or no home equity can get his payments radically cut. The catch: you have to be 90 days past due.

Need some extra Christmas cash? Perfect. Put Fannie off for the next three months, then let Uncle Sam work his mortgage magic.

"But what about the moral obligation to pay off a debt?" Kathleen Pender asks in the *San Francisco Chronicle*. Washington wiped that out a long time ago. If government has no obligation to live within its means, it can scarcely expect citizens to be more responsible. Besides, those predatory lenders had it in for us. "In a campaign fact sheet," Pender writes, "President-elect Barack Obama says he 'recognizes that the real victims in the subprime crisis are not the lenders, but the millions of borrowers who followed the rules and whose only crime was taking out mortgages that

lenders told them they could afford.'"

Here's how the scheme works: miss the required number of payments, and those nice folks at the Federal Housing Administration will cut your interest rate—as low as 3 percent!—extend the time you have to pay, or reduce your principal. All three if you're lucky. Loan servicers will be thrilled to help—they get \$800 for every homeowner they sign up. And you won't have to pay more than 38 percent of your gross income. Better yet, all other assets are off the table, so don't worry about that speedboat you bought with the home-equity loan. They can't touch it.

The feds claim borrowers won't game the system because delinquent payments will ding their credit ratings. But in a country where each household has an average of \$8,299 unpaid on plastic, that looks like a losing bet.

[IRAQ]

FASTER, PLEASE

The Bush administration has concluded a secret agreement with Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki's government to bring all American troops home from Iraq by 2011. It's so secret, the Bush administration has refused to make any details public in the U.S., and the president insists he does not need and will not seek Congress's approval.

Maliki wishes he had it so easy. Iraq's

Parliament, evidently stronger than our emasculated legislature, must approve the deal. But many Iraqis feel that two more years under U.S. custodianship is too long. On Nov. 19, Ahmad al-Masoudi, a lawmaker from Muqtada al-Sadr's Shi'ite faction, made his displeasure known by getting into a brawl on the floor of Parliament with Foreign Minister Hoshiyar Zebari's bodyguards. A Kurdish lawmaker was quoted by NPR saying, "They have been negotiating for nine months, without transparency, behind closed doors, without people knowing about it. ... Now they say, 'We give you one week to ratify it, or not.'"

At least the Iraqis get to vote on it. Over here, what little is known about the agreement comes from a translation of the text as it appeared in an Iraqi paper—the Bush administration has not seen fit to release the document to the American press. The black-market translation includes a remarkable passage that seems to cede control over U.S. forces to a joint U.S.-Iraqi committee. Reuters quotes Berkeley law professor Oona Hathaway saying such shared authority over American troops would be "unprecedented." Indeed. The Iraqis aren't the only ones who should object.

[WORLD]

ANARCHY AHOY!

Arrrr, there be a new global security threat. This month, off the coast of Somalia, a band of picaroons seized a supertanker loaded with more than \$120 million-worth of black gold bounty. The hijacking—the biggest in history—caused reverberations across the world's crude oil markets. It also drew attention to the growing international problem posed by the pirates of the Gulf of Arden, a vital waterway that separates the Middle East from North Africa.

Many wonder how this ancient crime has reared its head. The answer: Somali piracy is on the rise thanks to wors-

ening anarchy on the mainland. And that chaos, me lovelies, can be attributed in no small part to the outgoing Bush administration and its one-eyed quest to defeat terrorism.

In 2006, 15 years after the fall of dictator Mohamed Siad Barre, the popular rise of the Islamic courts movement led observers to predict that Somalia might achieve at least a semblance of order. But the U.S. government, responding to reports of a "new Taliban," turned against the emergent regime, funding and assisting Ethiopia's invasion of Somalia. The ensuing war has killed at least 10,000 Somalis, displaced more than a million, and left over 40 percent of the population in need of humanitarian assistance. Amid the mayhem, piracy has thrived and so has al-Qaeda. Chalk up another mission accomplished.

[MEDIA]

ONE CHEER FOR DAVID FRUM

The author of "Unpatriotic Conservatives" has parted ways with *National Review*. Has the Canadian expatriate who excommunicated Pat Buchanan and Robert Novak from American conservatism now been excommunicated himself?

Perhaps not. Frum says he's leaving to launch his own group blog, NewMajority.com. But there are some indications that *NR* has become too dogmatically Bushian even for David Frum. In a farewell message he writes, "I cannot be blind to the evidence that we have seen free markets produce some damaging and dangerous results in recent years. Or that the foreign policy I supported has not yielded the success I would have wished to see." Frum is no friend of traditionalists or noninterventionists. But give him credit for contemplating his mistakes. If only the rest of the movement would do the same. ■

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[king of the world]

Planet Obama

Global euphoria is better than the disrepute of the Bush years, but so far our new president's appeal is entirely symbolic.

By Theodore Dalrymple

LIKE IT OR NOT, the election of Barack Obama to the presidency of the United States has done an immense amount to restore American prestige in the world. Not since the destruction of the Twin Towers has there been dancing in the streets anywhere on the planet to celebrate events in America. It is to be hoped, of course, that it is not the same people doing the dancing.

In Delhi, Indians kissed Obama's photo. Parties spilled into the Kenyan streets. In Britain, the newspapers were beside themselves with joy. The *Daily Mirror*, a tabloid with a circulation of 3 million, ran a photo of the president-elect with a single large word to accompany it: BELIEVE. Even politicians who might have been expected to have more affinity for John McCain took pains to rejoice over Obama's victory.

A group of 8,000 Bedouin living in Galilee gleefully claimed Obama as a relative, thanks to his resemblance to a Kenyan who had worked in British-mandated Palestine in the 1930s. It is unlikely that anyone would have claimed Senator McCain, let alone President Bush, as a long-lost relative.

In France, the left-leaning, originally Maoist newspaper *Liberation* said that the fact that America had a member of a racial minority and a woman among the contenders for the highest offices in the

land meant that France could learn something about democracy from America. (It meant openness, which is not quite the same as democracy and may even sometimes be its opposite.)

When he went to Berlin, Obama addressed 200,000 enthusiastic people; it is doubtful that the Republican candidate would have drawn 200. After his election, the German tabloid *Bild* carried the headline "Messiah Obama," and though one might have thought that Germans, of all people, would have had enough of political messiahs, the characterization was a compliment. "Everyone has fallen in love with the new America," *Bild* said.

That a man who came from as inauspicious a beginning as Obama's could be elected president of the United States has demonstrated to millions around the globe that the idea of America as the land of opportunity is not mere mythology, and that whatever its faults, the U.S. political system is an extremely open one. The 21st-century version of From Log Cabin to White House is now From Food Stamps to White House.

Furthermore, the election of an opponent of George W. Bush, that object of global scorn, reassured the world that, contrary to conspiracy theorists, the United States is not a giant run by a tiny coterie of ruthless men bent on world domination.

Finally, the fact that Obama is black goes a long way toward expunging America's original historical sin, that of racism. It renders nugatory the charge of intellectuals around the world—and in American academia—that its pretensions to being the Land of the Free are hypocritical, a sentiment first expressed in Doctor Johnson's famous question from his "Taxation No Tyranny" of 1775: "How is it that we hear the loudest yelps for liberty among the drivers of negroes?"

Of course, there have been important positions occupied before by American blacks, both elected and appointed. But the presidency has a symbolic importance beyond its constitutional weight, and now no one will ever again be able to say that a man of African extraction cannot obtain the votes of large numbers of whites.

There are, it is true, a few naysayers: in the liberal British newspaper *The Guardian*, columnists whom one suspects were either stuck for something new to say about the election or prey to especial private bitterness argued that the election was not really a blow for racial equality because Michelle Obama could never have been elected, and the Republican Party certainly would never have chosen a black nominee. This seems to be a somewhat hard test for the United States to pass. Such people will

not really be satisfied until the Grand Wizard of the Ku Klux Klan is black.

On the other hand, the columnists did inadvertently draw attention to the absurdity of assuming that Obama's election will have some magical effect upon race relations. It is grossly premature to think that America, or anywhere else for that matter, has now reached some kind of post-racial consciousness in which color has become completely unimportant. To think so is to be very unrealistic about the potentialities and the actualities of the human race itself.

But here is what Janine di Giovanni, an American expatriate living in Paris, wrote in London's *Evening Standard*:

The surrealness of it struck me yesterday at Bon Marche. The man at the exchange counter, usually so surly, asked me my nationality. I got ready to do the usual: bowing my head with shame and whispering so no one could hear: 'Americaine.'

Thanks to the election, this cringe was no longer necessary, neither from the prudential nor the philosophical point of view: Then it hit me. I no longer had to feel ashamed! Barack Obama had liberated me and my fellow expats from a lifetime of humiliation. 'I'm American,' I practically shouted...

Note here that it was President-elect Obama's achievement alone, and not that of her fellow Americans who voted for him. This in itself speaks volumes of her racism, albeit of the Worc Mij, rather than the Jim Crow, variety. For her, Obama's achievement was greater than that of all earlier Americans put together, from Benjamin Franklin to Mark Twain to Jonas Salk. Only he gave her reason to be proud. She continued:

But after Barack, it's different. The day of the elections, I received this email from a French friend: 'To my

American friends, this won't happen often, so savour it. Here is a high five to your great country from a Frenchman.' Another French friend wrote: 'You guys make huge mistakes but when you do it right, you really do it.'

Whether this reflects more upon the American author or her French friends is a difficult question. What seems certain is that if an American of Chinese or Indian origin had been elected, Janine de Giovanni would not have written with quite so much self-satisfaction. From this it follows that she has race on the brain, and one race more than others. At the very least, you could not call this a post-racial consciousness brought about by Obama's victory.

Indeed, the idea that all historical sins have been washed away and all social difficulties resolved by the sprinkling of the holy water of this election is patently absurd, as absurd as investing the president-elect with magical powers in other directions.

George W. Bush's presidency marked the recent nadir of American popularity and trust in its leadership, according to polls nearly everywhere. "It is better to be feared than loved," AEI's Michael Ledeen advised Bush. But to be feared is not quite the same as to be powerful, for you can be feared for reasons other than the power you wield. Power is in any case often an illusion and it always has limits. Did the Iraq war deter or encourage Vladimir Putin and Dmitry Medvedev?

Barack Obama cannot singlehandedly accomplish a rehabilitation, neither by force of personality nor as a political emblem. Indeed, world skepticism is already making a comeback. Italian journalist Michele Brambilla pointed out the obvious: Obama is but a politician, and one should not expect too much of politicians as a species. A wary *China*

Daily wrote that Obama had been elected because voters judged him to have a better grasp of how to respond to the economic crisis, but noted that there is no practical evidence to show that he does—and his comments on Chinese economic policy and how he might respond to it could lead to conflict. In the Middle East, Obama's support for Israel during the election led most people to think that, from the Arab perspective, there would not be much change, at least for the better.

Here it is useful to remember Marx's words, not untrue simply because they came from him, in *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Napoleon*:

Men make their own history, but they do not make it as they please; they do not make it under self-selected circumstances, but under circumstances existing already, given and transmitted from the past. The tradition of all dead generations weighs like a nightmare on the brains of the living

For all his transcendent appeal, Obama cannot overcome the harsh realities of a troubled world. He inherits two wars, from one of which, Iraq, he has promised swiftly to extricate America, the other of which, Afghanistan, he has promised to win by expanding the effort. This is not exactly what the *Times of India* meant when it suggested that Obama stood for all that was good in America while Bush stood for "the bullying superpower that undertakes bellicose adventures abroad."

It might not be altogether easy to withdraw from Iraq without the appearance of defeat, which would deal a great blow to American prestige and pretensions. If Iraq without America declines into chaos, defeat it will have been, a near pointless and very expensive expedition that solved nothing. And although Obama has said that, unlike

his predecessor, he will give the military clear objectives, it is far from clear what the goal is in Afghanistan and, if there is one, whether it can be achieved.

Does Obama think that foreign policy is the pursuit of interests or ideals, or that interests can be secured only by the forcible promotion of ideals? Does he understand that no power, be it ever so great, is sufficient to mold others into precisely the desired form? That Afghanistan will never be Denmark? To adapt slightly Marx's dictum, countries can be changed, but not changed as others please: they are not putty in the fingers of workmen. Does the false analogy with postwar Germany and Japan, the great success stories of transformation brought about by war, have any place in his mind? We do not know. All we know is that he is like the traveler in Ireland who asks the local how to get to a certain destination and receives the reply, "If I were going there, I wouldn't start from here."

TO ADAPT SLIGHTLY MARX'S DICTUM, **COUNTRIES CAN BE CHANGED, BUT NOT CHANGED AS OTHERS PLEASE: THEY ARE NOT PUTTY IN THE FINGERS OF WORKMEN.**

When I looked at Obama shortly after the election, with his economic advisers behind him, I had a powerful sense of looking at a Politburo: gray-faced old men, tried and tested—which is not quite the same as successful, of course, except in the most careerist terms.

They were the living—or perhaps undead—embodiment of old ideas, the other side of the coin to Obama's soaring speeches. That rhetoric was always stale, despite the excellence of its delivery. When, for example, he said that he wanted to protect the pensions of employees rather than the severance of CEO's, he was appealing not to reason but to a force very much more powerful than reason—resentment. It is true that chief executive officers have managed

to extract large sums from companies over whose destruction they have presided. But it requires very little thought to realize that it is a little late in the day to save people's pensions by being derogatory about CEO's, however much they might deserve it.

Moreover, the appointment of Rahm Emanuel, a former director of Freddie Mac and the largest congressional recipient of hedge-fund donations, as White House chief of staff induces a powerful and not very pleasant sense of déjà vu. The appointment is a sign of things to come.

Britain has seen the Obama effect before. In 1997, a fresh-faced politician called Anthony Blair, promising the sun, the moon, and the stars, spoke with a passionate intensity that was somewhat lacking in detail and was elected to office in the land. His was a bright new dawn: a government that governed for the many not the few, as he put it, giving

the country a fresh start after a long-lasting, decrepit, and exhausted government had been thoroughly discredited.

Within a short time, this former unilateral-disarmer had proved himself the most belligerent and bellicose leader of Britain in recent times, willing to attack anyone as long as the victim couldn't fight back. His protests at the corruption of the previous government soon seemed to be more at its trifling scale rather than its dishonesty. What had been but a cottage industry became wholesale looting, speculation, influence-peddling, and embezzlement, all under a careful cover of legality and deep public purpose. Nothing like it had been seen since the 18th century. Shady businessmen of every nationality (and none)

were sure of a receptive ear (and purse). With freedom in his mouth, Prime Minister Blair created one new criminal offense a day for ten years and oversaw an unprecedented increase in bureaucratic control and official surveillance. Profligate with spending public funds to build an immense constituency of dependents, ranging from the near destitute to multimillionaires created by government contracts, he left a country—though of course not himself—on the brink of ruin. Speaking with evangelical fervor and giving every appearance of taking himself in, he behaved with a lack of scruple that left even cynics amazed and departed office the most reviled man in his nation's recent history.

I hope I am wrong in seeing an analogy with President-elect Obama. I hope that his rhetoric does not conceal as empty an interior as Blair's. That his youthfulness and rhetorical idealism do not belie an authoritarianism. That his moralizing does not conceal a lack of scruple and contempt for due process. That by social justice he does not mean pork barrel. But I do not think the auguries are good. When I heard him promise that he would cut taxes for 95 percent of Americans, I wondered how anyone could believe it for a moment, or that he would go through the budget line by line, as he said he would. Compared to that, Fairyland is intensely real.

For now, Obama's election has restored American prestige. It denies anti-Americans the pleasure of charging America with irredeemable racism. But the roots of anti-Americanism are far deeper than the ostensible reasons for it. Americans no less than the rest of the world have reason to be skeptical. ■

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Clinton Cabinet

The politics of change look surprisingly familiar.

By Kelley Beaucar Vlahos

PRESIDENT-ELECT Barack Obama may have a mandate for change, but it's becoming apparent that any transformation will have to come from within—literally. There is hardly a soul on his transition team or among his prospective administration who hasn't been inside the Beltway all along.

At one point during the campaign, Republicans nearly succeeded in painting a picture of a post-election Washington in which radicals with bright red parachutes would drop onto the National Mall like the Hollywood Soviets in 1984's "Red Dawn." But so far, the invasion looks more like a sprawling downtown reunion of spry old war buddies from another time—about eight years ago, in fact.

So ascendant are the Clintonistas that it's hard to believe Hillary lost. Far from generating a panic, however, their restoration has drawn sighs of relief from certain quarters. The new commander in chief—at least for now—seems more interested in massaging the status quo than in remaking the town in his own, still murky image.

"Clintonites are everywhere," declared *Politico* on Nov. 14, as headlines raged about the not-so-secret meeting between Obama and Lady Clinton. As we go to press, word is that Hillary will be offered the coveted secretary of state post, squeezing past loyal Obama surrogate Sen. John Kerry. Tapping the former first lady would be the final kiss sealing a merger of the Clinton and Obama camps. Kerry, who was arguably hurt by the lack of a similar

alliance during his own failed presidential campaign in 2004, would be thwarted again.

If Clinton is indeed brought into the Obama cabinet, she will probably know a broad swath of the new administration more intimately than the new president does. As of mid-November, more than half of the 50 people already appointed to transition or staff jobs have Clinton administration connections, including all but one of Obama's 12-member transition advisory board. Whether this will disarm the man who campaigned against having the same two families in the White House for a quarter century or, conversely, placate potential Democratic snipers and gain the trust of a wary public remains to be seen.

"The steps he's taking now hardly seem radical," said Terry Madonna, public affairs professor and head of the Keystone Poll at Franklin and Marshall College in Pennsylvania. "It does somewhat surprise me that he's leaning on so many Clinton 'old hands' as a backstop. At the same time ... he wants people in the White House who know how it functions."

Obama broadcast as much when he appointed Illinois Rep. Rahm Emanuel as his White House chief of staff just days after the election. A confidant of both the Clintons and Obama, Emanuel is a hardscrabble disciple of Washington *realpolitik*, a pragmatic political animal who spent his time out of elected office securing lucrative government deals for defense contractors. For Obama—still considered somewhat aloof and hardly

streetwise—Emanuel is now master-at-arms at 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, the president's eyes and ears in the party trenches on Capitol Hill.

Furthermore, Emanuel may help Obama skirt the mistakes of his Democratic predecessor, Bill Clinton, whose 1992 transition was marred by infighting and indecision. Now, sixteen years later, Clinton veterans are rolling in to provide stability. Their focus seems to be on cleaving to ritual and choreographing a flawless changing of the establishment guard rather than paving the way for some dizzying ideological advance, a rainbow army comprised of Obama's old—and new—special-interest friends.

Directing this political theater is Clinton White House chief of staff John Podesta. In addition to a cadre of former Clinton officials, Podesta brings new blood from his emergent center-left think tank, the Center for American Progress, which promises to replace the Brookings Institution and the Democratic Leadership Council (ironically where Bill and Hillary used to hang their hats) as a feeder for the new administration.

As Michael Crowley of *The New Republic* wrote, Podesta "has succeeded in providing Washington's fractious crunchy liberals with an ethos of corporate discipline and efficiency." That, combined with Obama's drive to engage the corporate elite and titans of previous Democratic administrations—particularly in the areas that concern Americans the most: the economy and war—indicates that the transition might

be nearly seamless. Perhaps too seamless for those hoping Obama would rattle Washington's musty cages.

Nov. 7 offered the first hint: standing behind the president-elect like a Praetorian Guard were a frankly non-diverse array of political, corporate, and Wall Street insiders: Robert Reich, former Clinton labor secretary; Roger Ferguson, head of TIAA-CREF and former vice chair of the Federal Reserve under Clinton; Richard Parsons, chairman of Time Warner; Robert Rubin, director and counselor of Citigroup and former Clinton Treasury secretary; Lawrence Summers, who succeeded Rubin as Treasury secretary and is now being considered for the same post in the Obama cabinet; Laura Tyson, former chairwoman of the President's Council of Economic Advisers under Clinton; Paul Volcker, Fed chairman under Presidents Carter and Reagan; and Roel Campos, former Clinton SEC commissioner, among others.

Transition "team leads" include Josh Gotbaum, an operating partner in the New York hedge fund Blue Wolf Capital, who served on the Carter administration's domestic-policy staff and did turns as a Clinton deputy Treasury secretary and as director of Clinton's Office of Management and Budget. Joining him is Michael Warren, a longtime financial and investment consultant and former executive director of President Clinton's National Economic Council.

Meanwhile, Senator Clinton will certainly find herself among friends if she heads to Foggy Bottom in January. Former Clinton Secretary of State Warren Christopher has reportedly signed on to help with the transition, though Obama's people deny it. Other names associated with the handover include Wendy Sherman, a principle in Albright Capital Management, an international investment firm founded by another Clinton secretary of state, Madeleine Albright. Sherman also worked for Albright at State and was a

special adviser to Clinton on North Korea. She was also president of the Fannie Mae Foundation from 1996 to 1997. Her partner on the transition team, Tom Donilon, was a top lobbyist for Fannie Mae from 1999 to 2005 and served as chief of staff and spokesman at the Clinton State Department.

As *TAC* went to press, former Clinton deputy attorney general and U.S. Attorney Eric Holder had reportedly been offered the attorney general post. In 2001, Holder allowed the controversial Mark Rich pardon to proceed on Bill Clinton's last day in office and is still remembered for his role in returning 6-year-old Elian Gonzalez to his father in Cuba. Greg Craig, who was just named White House counsel, served as legal representation for Gonzalez's father. He also led the Clintons' defense team during the 1999 impeachment and was a former foreign policy adviser to both Albright and Sen. Ted Kennedy.

Another contender for the AG spot was Jamie Gorelick, who also served as deputy attorney general under Clinton and later as a member of the 9/11 Commission. She was a vice chairwoman of Fannie Mae from 1998 to 2003, just before the mortgage giant was consumed by a blistering \$11 billion accounting scandal.

Perhaps there's no area more fraught with potential disappointments than in foreign policy and defense. Liberal peaceniks and traditional conservatives held high hopes that Obama would at least restrain the current interventionist policies in the Middle East and Central Asia, promote diplomacy over force, and redirect resources—both human and monetary—back home.

But so far it looks as if Obama will convince consummate Republican bureaucrat Robert Gates to stay on as secretary of defense. The deputy director of the CIA under President Ronald Reagan and CIA director for President

George H.W. Bush was brought into the current Bush administration to stanch the bleeding caused by Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld. Though considered a realist antidote when he took over two years ago, Gates has never supported a timeline for withdrawing from Iraq. He is in sync with the growing Democratic wisdom that the U.S. should keep pounding away at the Pakistani border and plug tens of thousands more American troops into Afghanistan. Former Clinton Navy Secretary Richard Danzig and Sens. Chuck Hagel and Jack Reed—both critics of President George W. Bush—have been mentioned for the top job, but the idea that Gates would provide a steady bridge between the two administrations has been blessed by Democratic opinion-makers.

Not surprisingly, many of the names floated for top national-security positions hew to the post-Bush Doctrine view that COIN (counterinsurgency) is the best strategy for winning the war on terror. So far Obama has publicly denied neoconservative hawks a seat at the table, but he seems to be replacing them with liberal interventionists from the Clinton era—and more recently Hillary's campaign—who advance the virtues of what Professor Andrew Bacevich calls the "Petraeus Doctrine."

The Center for a New American Security—"Obama's Pentagon-in-Waiting" according to *Washington Independent* scribe Spencer Ackerman—has been generating an avalanche of white papers and a cupboard full of experts supporting the new counterinsurgency meme. Obama has already made CNAS co-founder and former Clinton defense official Michèle Flournoy a DoD transition team leader. CNAS co-founder Kurt Campbell is also a former Clinton Pentagon and National Security Council veteran. In addition, the think tank boasts former Bush military officers like John Nagl, a retired lieutenant colonel who

served in Iraq and as a top military assistant in Rumsfeld's Pentagon before becoming a full-time disciple of the type of "crusader" counterinsurgency that Bacevich says promotes "protracted, ambiguous and continuous" armed conflict and glorified nation building.

Other Obama security advisers include Jim Steinberg, a former Clinton National Security Council official and adviser on Hillary's presidential campaign, and former Democratic Sen. Sam Nunn, a critic of the Iraq War who nonetheless sits on the board of General Electric, which received 281 defense contracts worth \$8.8 billion from 2000 to 2007.

The total effect of this Clintonesque flashback may soon begin to wear on the liberal grassroots that helped to propel Obama into the White House. For years, the new school has been openly confrontational with the old school—the neo-progressives versus Clinton-anointed centrists at the DLC. Liberal purists at *The Nation* are agog that Obama would even consider Larry Summers—whom they call an undistinguished opportunist—much less Robert Gates, to lead the country out of its current troubles.

Others don't see Clintonization as an invasion at all. It's the ideas, not necessarily the people, that matter now: "The proof will be in the pudding rather than the cooks," *New York Observer* columnist Joe Conason tells *TAC*.

Even so, word that Hillary might be joining Obama's cabinet has shaken many online activists whose pride in helping achieve a new Democratic era in Washington is dissolving into concern that Obama is ceding too much to the old regime. Obama is where he is today because he convinced voters that Hillary was yesterday's news. Only time will tell if she and her old war-room buddies will get the last word. ■

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Africa's Last, Worst Hope

A continent that withstood European colonialism welcomes Chinese conquest.

By Peter Hitchens

IT IS THE OPTIMISM of Africa that is so heartbreaking. In the alleyways of townships where human waste dribbles among the potholes, in mud villages where tiny homes cluster round anthills, the same scene replays. Out of dim hovels come scrubbed children in dazzlingly clean uniforms, hurrying to disciplined schools where they hope to better themselves. On Sundays, platoons of beautifully dressed, joyous women make their way proudly to full churches, carrying themselves like royalty. In the great cities, a thousand tiny businesses compete good-naturedly for scanty trade. They are adorned with spirited, witty, and cheerful artwork that Westerners—most of whom could not draw a bar of soap with any verisimilitude—dismiss as naïve. All this takes place in circumstances of misery and squalor, corruption, and oppression that would reduce most of us to passive gloom. We know how little reason for hope there really is. So do the Africans, but they are unable to stop hoping.

Any development that might lift this sad continent out of its present state would at least justify the optimism. This is how many people quite reasonably view China's powerful new engagement in Africa. It may be wholly cynical, they argue, but utopian and idealistic interventions have all failed. Much of Africa's existing infrastructure and its most powerful and developed economy in South

Africa are the results of comparable Western cynicism in the past. Perhaps straightforward crudity—hard cash, roads, clinics, and railroads in return for oil and minerals—will work where benevolence did not. As one academic expert on the subject said to me, "The only country that ever got rich from donations was the Vatican." Perhaps China's hunger for new markets will lift African economies out of their pitiful condition and start them on the long road out of the Third World. It is not as if there is much chance of Africa once again becoming the sort of Garden of Eden that some believe that it was before outsiders burst in.

I set out on a small African voyage to see how China's initiative looked at close quarters. I did not know before I began that my companions and I would come alarmingly close to death during that journey, though I suspected it might have its awkward moments.

I chose two neighboring countries, Zambia and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. One had a relatively peaceful British past, at least partly benevolent. The other was the victim of Belgium's notoriously rapacious King Leopold and the scene of the violent Katanga secession, which still resonates in African politics. This enormous, potentially wealthy country has seen worse things since, and may see worse things yet.

The Congo's government, a despotism thinly disguised as an elective democracy, has welcomed Beijing into their affairs without qualification and recently accepted a colossal Chinese loan in return for equally gargantuan rights of exploitation. They did so just as the IMF was attempting to make conditions for a large, mainly Western aid parcel.

THE CONGO'S GOVERNMENT, A DESPOTISM THINLY DISGUISED AS AN ELECTIVE DEMOCRACY, HAS **WELCOMED BEIJING** INTO THEIR AFFAIRS WITHOUT QUALIFICATION AND RECENTLY ACCEPTED A **COLOSSAL CHINESE LOAN** IN RETURN FOR EQUALLY **GARGANTUAN RIGHTS OF EXPLOITATION.**

Zambia, by contrast, has something much closer to an Anglosphere democracy. There are functioning opposition parties. One of them, led by the populist Michael Sata, has criticized Chinese investment in the country. Sata—known in Zambia by allies and enemies as “King Cobra” because he is effective, ruthless, and slippery—narrowly lost the presidential election last month. The generally pro-Chinese Zambian establishment did not want him to win, even though he had moderated some of his criticisms of Beijing during the campaign. He told me that China's methods invited corruption among governments and that safety standards at Chinese-run mines and factories were miserable.

He is not the only person to make this accusation. Recently, a government minister, Alice Simago, was shown weeping on Zambian TV after she witnessed the shockingly dangerous working conditions at a Chinese-owned coal mine in the Southern Province. When I contacted her, though, she, unlike Michael Sata, was not willing to discuss it. Zambia's political class does not want to offend the Chinese, who once threatened to cut ties if Sata became president. Sata also told

me that China imported its own workers into Africa, denying skilled jobs to Africans who were quite capable of doing them. On building sites in the capital, Lusaka, you can see many Chinese workers toiling away in straw hats that have a startlingly 19th-century look.

It was in Zambia's Copper Belt that I found Sata's complaints most strongly

borne out. This narrow band of copper- and cobalt-rich territory, close to the Congolese border, is going through a boom mainly because of Chinese and Indian industrial growth. Copper and cobalt, essential for electrical wiring, telecommunications, jet engines, and the batteries of mobile phones, are the raw materials of the modern world.

Critics of Sata—and friends of China—had warned me in advance that Sata was inclined to exaggerate. There were whispers that he was in some way a supporter of Taiwan—a large purpose of China's scramble for Africa is to destroy what remains of Taiwan's once considerable diplomatic influence there. China's cold rage against Taiwan's very existence as a separate country should never be underestimated or forgotten when trying to predict what Beijing may do next.

But in the Copper Belt itself—an incongruous and disturbing chain of mainly dreary towns, where spoil-heaps and pithead winding gear rear above African bush country in oppressive, malarial heat—Sata turned out to be right. Trade union officials complained that Chinese supervisors often beat and kicked African subordinates. An opposi-

tion paper report, which I checked and found to be accurate, of a building worker in Ndola who was beaten by his Chinese superiors because he had fallen asleep. (Urban Africans often fall asleep during the day because, living crammed together in tiny, stuffy shacks with three or four generations, they sleep badly at night. They also suffer from inadequately treated or preventable illnesses, including malaria.)

The Africans who talked about this did not accuse the Chinese of racial bigotry against them. The complaint was more subtle. As one mineworker said to me, “It is a fear of being seen to be weak. They are trying to prove they are not inferior to the West. They are trying too hard. If they ask you to do something and you don't do it, they think you're not doing it because they are not white.”

The Chinese are also highly sensitive to criticism of their safety record. My colleagues and I went to look at and photograph a dispiriting little roadside cemetery, laid out among the dry, tall grass right at the entrance of the Chambishi copper mine, which shelters the remains of 54 mineworkers killed in an explosives disaster in 2005. Local people are inclined to blame the Chinese for this event. Within a couple of hours, local “security” officials were buzzing around, anxious about what we were up to. They had obviously been tipped off by the Chinese managers who had seen us among the gravestones. No wonder they are sensitive. An African mine executive recalled the day three years ago when Zambia, a country of 11 million people, went into official mourning for the victims of this catastrophe. A Chinese supervisor said to me in broken English, “In China, 5,000 people die, and there is nothing. In Zambia, 50 people die and everyone is weeping. To [the Chinese], 50 people are nothing.” I find this quite believable. Conditions in Chinese mines are famously appalling.

There is much resentment. Workers at a nearby smelter recently rioted against low wages and what they felt were dangerous working conditions. Zambians snigger at the way their Chinese colleagues talk, describing it mockingly as “Choncholi.” The Chinese are said to kill and eat any dogs that stray into their compounds. And there is a persistent rumor—which I was unable to confirm but mention because it seems to be a symptom of the hostility and mistrust—that there are convicted criminals among the Chinese workforce in Africa.

It is also interesting to learn the private views of Western businessmen who work in Africa. Such people are not Pollyanna types. They know that this is not a gentle or straightforward continent. Nevertheless, one American on his way to the Congo was visibly angry at what he saw as Chinese willingness to encourage and benefit from corruption. His firm tries diligently to abide by Congolese safety laws. But it is constantly targeted by official safety inspectors because it refuses to bribe them. Meanwhile, nearby Chinese enterprises get away with huge breaches of the law. “We never pay,” said the American, “because once you pay, you become their bitch; you will pay forever and ever.”

Another Western manager in a Congolese factory shrugged over the way he is forced to wait weeks to get his products out of the country, while the Chinese have no such problems. “I’m not sure the Chinese even know there are customs regulations,” he said. “They don’t fill in the forms, they just pay. I try to be philosophical about it, but it is not easy.”

The trouble with these honorable views is that if the Chinese have no special objection to such arrangements and are willing to pay forever and ever, then those who take the ethical position will simply lose in the struggle for raw materials. What many in the West do not

grasp is the driven urgency of China’s current dash for growth and status, brought home to me by a casual remark from a Chinese businessman over a drink in a Congolese hotel. He said, “Africa is China’s last hope.” China is also the only obvious hope for many poor Africans—a hope mixed with desperation.

It is difficult to do justice to the series of powerful impressions the traveler to Lubumbashi, Congo’s capital, receives. This city, once the Belgian colonial town of Elizabethville and for a while the capital of Moïse Tshombe’s breakaway state of Katanga, is profoundly disturbing to our group, a European, an American, and a white South African who hopes that the Mandela settlement will

broods over it, a 450-foot high monument to 80 years of rapacity and conflict. This sinister manmade outcrop, which looks like part of an attempt to recreate Tolkien’s Mordor, is the product of decades of copper mining and smelting. Next to it stand the colossal tottering ruins of abandoned smelters, destroyed in one civil war or another and left to rust. Within the mountain are layers of slag and fragments of unrefined metal, often left lying around by the cruder methods of the past. The local inhabitants toil at its foot and on its slope, pounding the slag with hammers to release pieces of copper or cobalt, which they can sell, for a few dollars, to lurking middlemen, who naturally work for the Chinese.

CHINA IS ALSO THE ONLY OBVIOUS HOPE FOR MANY POOR AFRICANS—A HOPE MIXED WITH DESPERATION.

preserve a more or less European way of life under African government. There is no sign here of the fairly orderly society that Zambia inherited from the British Empire. Lubumbashi is far more African. You can see the ghostly shape of the Northern Hemisphere’s last major engagement with Africa. The airport, once an airy 1950s building, is now a decrepit and leaking dump. It would be unwise and unsafe to enter or pass through without an experienced guide. The transition from air-conditioned modern aircraft to the shouting, milling scenes in the terminal is one of the most melodramatic crossings from one world to another that I have made—and I have made plenty. In the center, the graceful shapes of colonial Art Deco constructions still survive under layers of white-wash and dust, unregarded by the new inhabitants.

Above all is the great black mountain, which rears up at the edge of town and

But this process is even more intense and painful further out in the bush, in a place called Likasi. I had been told of child diggers slaving for a few cents in perilous hand-dug shafts in an abandoned mine there, washing their ore in cholera-infected streams contaminated by human filth and going home after exhausting working days to living deaths in hungry squatter camps. Once again, they are working indirectly for China, the ultimate buyer of their scavenged scraps. My colleagues, Barbara Jones and Richard van Ryneveld, and I set out there with two African coworkers, who it would be better for many reasons not to name.

I would like to return to Likasi if it were not for the fact that I was nearly killed there. The road from Lubumbashi is lovely, lined with thatched villages and running through unspoiled bush. The town itself is, like Lubumbashi, pleasing to the eye. Graceful but decay-

ing Belgian buildings still rise over an agreeable scene of African activity, sociability, and enterprise. But at the edge of Likasi, things suddenly grow much grimmer.

Slogging up the potholed track toward us was a gaunt, unceasing procession of blank-faced men (and sometimes women), pushing ancient bicycles laden with sacks of ore weighing at least 100 pounds.

At the end of this highway was a scene so intensely shocking that I can recall it instantly by closing my eyes. Picture a great, uneven pit, the result of decades of energetic and inconsiderate mining, a gang rape of the earth's surface perhaps a quarter of a mile across, under a brassy sun. Then notice that in dozens of small excavations, bowed black figures are hacking and dragging and pulling small objects from the earth.

FURIOUS FACES STARED IN. THE WORKERS BEGAN TO ROCK THE CAR AND HAMMER ON IT WITH ROCKS. THEN THEY BEGAN TO BREAK THE WINDOWS.

It is ominously quiet apart from the crunching, tinkling noise of hard labor. Every couple of minutes, another of these despairing figures emerges from the bottom of the pit with a laden bicycle and plods toward town. It is like something from before the Middle Ages. One of the Brueghels, or perhaps Hieronymus Bosch, might have painted the scene, only they would have shown it in darkness, lit up by a red glow.

We approached the fat cop, sheltering under a shady awning, who seemed to be in charge. He wasn't. He was plainly deferring to a dead-eyed boss man, with one badly chewed ear, sitting to the side. We explained that I wished to write about the mine and that we needed to take some photographs. The cop riffled through our many official permissions and said we needed yet more paper-

work. I took this to mean that he needed some paper money, but our Congolese fixer refused to consider this possibility. We went back to Likasi to a series of offices. I am not even sure if we got the necessary chit.

It wouldn't have mattered. As we bounced and squeaked down the miserable track once more, I noticed that the procession of laden bicycles had inexplicably stopped. Then we passed a small group of miners, including a boy of about 12 who snarled at me with an expression of pure hatred such as I had not seen before that day, would shortly see once more, and which I hope not to see again. My white colleagues, one African-born and the other with years of experience in the more worrying corners of the continent, also noticed strange signs—large stones on the road and men running uphill away from us.

None of us realized just how much danger we were in. But while we had been in town, someone had prepared an ambush. We found this out when we turned a corner and saw a crowd of about 50 men ranged across the road, yelling imprecations. Plainly, the gangmasters at the mine had told them we were a threat to their \$5-a-day livelihood. Perhaps they were right about that.

Western exposure of these dismal conditions might lead to the mine being closed down, if only long enough to make the workers' hard lives even harsher. Our minder, ignoring my urgings to leave immediately, climbed from the car to try to reason with the crowd. The Congolese driver joined him. Unimpressed and unassuaged, the mob began to edge round the car. Barbara, Richard, and I were all in the back seats. If we got

out, we thought, we would be beaten to death. If we stayed inside, it seemed very likely that we would also be killed—after having been dragged through broken windows.

My mind almost shut down, refusing to consider the future in any detail. I am ashamed to say that it did not occur to me to pray, though I certainly did later on, once my imagination had begun to work again. I suspect I would have prayed a good deal if things had gone much further.

Furious faces stared in. The workers began to rock the car and hammer on it with rocks. Then they began to break the windows. At this moment the driver recovered his senses and began to reverse furiously down the track. He left his Congolese colleague behind, and I have to admit that I thought we had seen the last of him and cared less than I should have.

After some wild reversing, we had gained enough space for a violent two-point turn and were able to go forward. It was then that we saw our abandoned comrade pelting after us at Olympic speed, with the mob just visible behind him in the dust of our flight. They were approaching astonishingly fast. We slowed enough for him to scramble aboard and tore off out of Likasi. A burst tire or a broken axle and we would have been done for.

This miserable event, I thought afterward, was a metaphor for the Chinese intervention in Africa. Things are so bad for most Africans that they would rather have the greed and corruption that China brings than go without them. They will angrily resent those who preach contentment to them from places of safety. And they will continue to hope against all odds. ■

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Collateral Damage

Why the usual fixes aren't stopping the financial freefall

By Tom Streithorst

IN THE PAST MONTH, the monetary base—also known as M0 or, more piquantly, high-powered money—has shot up 25 percent. For the first time, the only part of the money supply utterly controlled by the Federal Reserve exceeds \$1 trillion. This spectacular spike demonstrates the increasing desperation of our central bankers: the usual medicine isn't working. We have had billion-dollar giveaways to banks, over a trillion dollars poured into the world financial system, and still markets are plummeting and banks are hoarding their capital, starving even credit-worthy clients of cash.

It all began last summer after a couple of Bear Sterns hedge funds went bust, causing concerns about securities based on the U.S. housing market contaminating the entire financial sector. Interbank lending evaporated, the system threatened to seize up.

The world's central bankers reacted as they have in every financial crisis of the past 25 years. They cut interest rates, opened the discount window, flooded the world with liquidity, and assumed that with all this new cash slopping around, financial markets would calm down and banks would again begin to lend. Instead, banks are locking their vaults, "deleveraging" is the word on investment bankers' lips, and the party on Wall Street is no more.

It hasn't taken long for the crisis to spill out of the financial sector into the real economy. Consumer spending was down 3.1 percent last quarter, the steepest decline since 1980, the first decline in

17 years. For the past generation, despite stagnating wages, even during recessions, American consumers have always managed to increase their spending, to the glee of producers around the world. If we don't max out our credit cards, a factory in China closes.

Debt has been the fuel that has propelled both the financial economy and the real economy. But with banks desperate to repair their balance sheets, they have choked off lending. Easy credit promoted both consumer spending and asset price inflation. With credit shrinking, no wonder house and stock prices are falling and consumers are finally closing their wallets.

Over the past few decades, we have stimulated demand and kept the economy growing by inflating a series of successive asset bubbles. Whenever one popped, low interest rates and increased liquidity created another one. The Latin American debt crisis, the 1987 stock market crash, the junk-bond defaults of the late '80s, the "tequila crisis" of 1994, the Long-Term Capital Management (LTCM) crash of 1998—all were cured with the same strategy of easy money. The biggest and best example is Greenspan's reaction to the popping of the dot-com bubble in 2000. He cut interest rates to the lowest level in 40 years and sparked the housing bubble, the bursting of which we are now suffering. Accustomed to Federal Reserve mollycoddling, financial markets became complaisant, confident that central bankers would bring out the punch bowl any time asset prices threatened to fall.

But now, despite spiking the punch with massive amounts of cash, central banks are unable to calm markets. Why?

One explanation is that these years of debt-fuelled prosperity so overleveraged investment banks that even relatively minor asset price declines became devastating. At 30 to 1 leverage, common during the halcyon days of the boom, a mere 4 percent decline can wipe out a firm's capital.

Another is that unlike 1987, and unlike LTCM, this is not a liquidity crisis in which fear of panic-selling by others causes investors to unload intrinsically sound assets at bargain-basement prices. This is a solvency crisis. The assets held by the banks are fundamentally worth less than their liabilities. The only way government can cure a solvency crisis is to overpay for the dubious assets on banks' balance sheets, a politically hazardous solution that rewards the fat cats whose profligacy got us into this mess.

A third is that the hypermathematization of finance created such opaque securities that no one had any idea how fragile the system might be. Arcane models deluded bankers into thinking they could unload risk, not realizing that since the financial world is a closed system, risk can be moved but not avoided, and while you unload your toxic waste to another, he is simultaneously unloading his toxic waste onto you. Everybody knows there is a lot of bad debt out there. No one wants to do business when they fear their counterparty might go bust.

But there is a deeper explanation, perhaps more satisfying both aesthetically and morally. We have for a generation borrowed not to invest in productive resources but to consume. Our traditional understanding of finance, the one still found in the first chapter of introductory textbooks, is that financial markets take household savings and efficiently allocate them to the most productive ends. That is to say, finance is supposed to allow productive investment, which will create a cash flow that can repay lenders while still making a profit for entrepreneurs. Finance, then, by allowing real investment in productive capacity, mobilizes capital, makes workers more productive, and profits the entire society.

When J.P. Morgan used British capital in the 19th century to buy U.S. railroad bonds, that investment did more than make him lots of money: it built a transcontinental railroad, brought producers and markets closer together, reduced transportation costs dramatically, and thus enriched all of America. The debt incurred was wisely spent. That is the way finance is supposed to work. But it doesn't work that way any more.

Finance has become self-referential—dare I say postmodern?—ever more divorced from the business of building productive resources. Arbitrage, the buying and selling of almost

identical securities with enormous leverage to exploit minute price anomalies, does nothing to promote productive investment. Neither do leveraged buyouts or private equity deals that use a company's cash flow to pay for its own takeover. They might make a few investors and investment bankers rich, but by saddling a company with huge unproductive debt, they make it impossible for the firm to expand, to invest in productive capacity, to increase research and development, to hire more workers.

And so the ultimate reason that the traditional medicine of increased liquidity isn't working is that we cannot borrow and spend our way to prosperity forever. It worked as long as the value of paper assets kept going up, as long as debts could be dissolved away as asset price increases allowed further borrowing. But all our borrowing has not created real productive investment that would have created a cash flow with which to pay off our debts no matter what happens in financial markets. Credit is a form of faith. We have been

WHEN FINANCE NO LONGER DOES ITS TRADITIONAL JOB OF CREATING REAL INVESTMENT, OF BUILDING PRODUCTIVE RESOURCES, OF CREATING FACTORIES OR INFRASTRUCTURE, IT BECOMES A PAPER GAME.

Indeed, because of corporate stock buybacks, for the past 20 years the flow of funds in U.S. equity markets has actually gone in the opposite direction. Instead of sending funds from households to allow corporate investment, retained corporate profits are being sent in the opposite direction, to stockholders to fund even more consumption. The rise of finance has seen a decrease in real investment as a percentage of GDP.

With wage and goods inflation under control, the spectacular increase in the money supply since 1982 went into inflating paper assets. Increased asset prices raised the value of collateral, making banks ever more willing to lend. But just increasing the value of an asset does not create a cash flow with which to repay that debt. Your house may have been worth \$1 million in 2005, \$700,000 today, \$35,000 in 1979, but it is still the same house. Building a railroad creates a cash flow that can pay off a debt. Buying a house does not, except, of course, by allowing access to home equity loans.

dependent on that faith never faltering, even as the real economy grows less able to back up the financial economy's promises.

Recapitalizing the banks with taxpayer money will not do the trick as long as banks fear clients' ability to service their debts. The problem is that the financial economy has cashed checks that the real economy cannot honor. The rise of finance has coincided with the slowdown of growth in the postwar Western economies. Indeed, the median male American worker makes less money in real terms today than he did in 1973. This is not a coincidence. When finance no longer does its traditional job of creating real investment, of building productive resources, of creating factories or infrastructure, it becomes a paper game, a parasite on the real economy. When labor's share of the economic pie increases, that stimulates demand, which allows the economy to grow. When the entrepreneurs' share increases, that stimulates investment, which makes the society more produc-

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tive. But increasing finance's share—interest payments were 1 percent of GDP during the postwar Golden Age of economic growth, compared to over 16 percent today—neither creates real investment nor stimulates mass-market demand. It promotes high-end consumption, helping yacht brokers, Lamborghini dealers, and Greenwich real estate, but doing little for the rest of us.

We will, one way or the other, in the long term or short, ultimately revitalize the balance sheets of the financial sector. The big question is what can replace debt-fuelled consumption to stimulate demand. The Achilles heel of capitalism is overproduction. (This is a good thing, it reflects the staggering efficiency of capitalism. The Achilles heel of every other economic system is underproduction.) In the past quarter century we have solved the problem of stagnating wages and thus underconsumption with increased availability of credit. The willingness of households and governments to incur ever increasing levels of debt has maintained effective demand and thus allowed global economic growth. Unfortunately, our hunger to consume has proved both essential and unsustainable.

If there is one reason to be optimistic, it is that we are learning that focusing on Wall Street will not make us all rich, that our concentration has to return to the real economy of goods and services, of wages and work, of real investment for the future. For too long, our economic masters have thought that a booming stock market is the goal of economic policy. It is not. We have borrowed our way to prosperity, borrowed not to create productive investment but to buy beyond our means. Shifting from consumption to investment just might save us. ■

Tom Streithorst is an American living in London.

Analysts who follow military developments in Iran note that the intermediate range Shahab-3 ballistic missile, developed from North Korean designs over ten years ago, has apparently had its guidance system upgraded.

As ballistic missiles only truly become strategic assets if they can hit the target, the enhancement might well be a game-changer in the Middle East, as it would enable Iran to hit and destroy targets throughout the region. The Shahab has a range of 1,300 miles and can carry a conventional war-head that weighs one ton, large enough to do an enormous amount of damage. The Iranians are believed to have 100 or more Shahabs, mostly stored in dispersed bomb-proof underground sites under the control of the Revolutionary Guard. Intelligence sources suggest that the new guidance system, possibly developed with the clandestine assistance of the Russians, relies on a military version of a GPS system, similar to the technology used in navigation devices in automobiles, which greatly improves the accuracy of the missile. Previously, the Shahab was only accurate to within half a mile, but it is now reportedly able to hit a target within 50 yards.

If this is true—some experts doubt that such accuracy is obtainable—it means Iran can plausibly target and destroy Israel's Dimona nuclear plant. Israel has considerable antimissile capabilities with its Patriot and Arrow batteries, but Iran could fire Shahabs in volleys, guaranteeing that some of the missiles would get through. In a war with Israel, the Iranians could cause a mini Chernobyl in the Negev Desert, a possibility that is forcing the Israeli government to hesitate in its plans to strike the Iranian nuclear infrastructure. The destruction of the Dimona reactor, still operational though old and very dirty, would produce widespread radioactive contamination, devastating for a small country like Israel.



A secret report by the British government's Joint Terrorism Analysis Center reveals that there are "some thousands" of extremists active in the UK, grouped in 200 terrorist networks.

The profile of the would-be terrorist is a British-born Pakistani, aged 18 and 30, frequently trained in overseas terrorist camps. "Some thousands" is an imprecise figure, but other sources in the intelligence community confirm that the number of British residents currently under police surveillance is larger than the 2,000 individuals who were cited as posing a threat one year ago, meaning that the problem is growing, at least in the eyes of the security services. One would think that since Britain is awash in terrorists there would be a large number of arrests and convictions, but that is not so, suggesting that the police might be inflating the threat. Since 2001, over 1,200 terrorist suspects have been arrested, but only 140 were charged with crimes, and only 45 have been convicted. In the U.S., the number of terrorism investigations is classified but is believed to number more than 10,000. As in Britain, there have been few convictions on terrorism charges, and no one convicted was actually capable of carrying out a terrorist act.

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You Can Make This Stuff Up

Vince Flynn writes of a world in which terrorists are always at the door. Unfortunately, official Washington hasn't realized he's a novelist.

By Michael Brendan Dougherty

THE BUSH AIDE who claimed "We create our own reality" could have added that novelist Vince Flynn would be a consultant. Flynn's books have been discussed by cabinet members and intelligence-agency heads. He claims his potboilers are the bedtime reading of Presidents Clinton and Bush. Last month, he landed at the top of the *New York Times* bestseller list with *Extreme Measures*. And after signing a lucrative deal with CBS Films, he is sending the protagonist of his novels, CIA super-killer Mitch Rapp, to a multiplex near you. It's Vince Flynn's world—we in the reality-based community have to get used to it.

What Tom Clancy did for the Cold War, Flynn is doing for the war on terror. His ten books have made him the darling of talk-radio and media hawks. Laura Ingraham had him on her show to discuss geopolitics. Bill O'Reilly said of Flynn's *Memorial Day*, "Every American should read this book." The *Washington Times* considers Rapp "A Rambo perfectly suited to the war on terror."

Flynn is no litterateur. His Mitch Rapp is a comic-book character trapped in a series of novels. Like Batman, Rapp is summoned to perform dark deeds on behalf of a cowardly political establishment. Sometimes that means sharpshooting a few jihadis, often it involves torturing them for information. Rapp has three emotional settings. At the offices at Langley, he is brooding. In the field or in the interrogation room, he is

enraged, either at the terrorists or at the State Department for questioning his methods. At funerals, he is enraged but also sad.

The prose is as thudding and one dimensional as Rapp. Every chest-pounding cliché about "what it takes" to combat terror is followed by actual chest-pounding. From Flynn's latest bestseller: "Eventually someone had to reach out and wrap their hands around the throat of the enemy and pick apart their network. At the moment, Rapp was trying to do just that. With his left hand he tightened his grip around Haggani's larynx and forced his head back." It's as if Flynn conjures a hackneyed phrase like "tear the heart out of a terrorist cell" and thinks to himself, "literally!"

The plots are improbable. In *Transfer of Power*, a group of terrorists seizes the White House until Rapp uncovers them. In another, Rapp is sent to destroy Saddam's nuclear arsenal. Yet even after he foils all these terrorist plots, politicians still get in his way.

Flynn, like many airport-book authors, relies on stereotyping to do the work of characterization he can't do himself. A dastardly German loves to admire his car's engineering while cruising on the Autobahn; Rapp's wife, a television journalist, likes to shop and drinks chardonnay; the Saudi villain of *Consent to Kill* has a camel-shaped swimming pool.

But the worst stereotypes are reserved for Americans. Consider the

assumptions behind a key moment in *Memorial Day*: Al-Adel, a Saudi terrorist who works in shipping, tries to co-operate with an FBI probe, but "after many months his Arabic pride emboldened him. He's lived in America just long enough to understand what to do. The idea came to him while watching TV one night." He hires a civil-rights attorney he sees on cable news. If he can distract Americans long enough by appealing to their native tolerance, he can deliver a nuclear warhead to the White House. Luckily, Mitch Rapp isn't a softie for political correctness.

Because Flynn's novels have one thing to say—terrorists are irrational radicals enabled by America's squeamish establishment—he is considered something of an expert by conservatives. At book readings, fans ask him what America's policy toward Iran should be. He discusses the finer points of Islamic theology on morning zoo shows. On a recent Rush Limbaugh program, a caller declared, "I used to live in the Middle East, and it just amazes me how right on [Flynn] is over there, it just amazes me. I mean, it's just like he's lived over there forever." Rush added, "He may have."

Flynn's path to the bestseller list isn't that exotic, but it is inspiring in its way. Before becoming a novelist, he had to overcome dyslexia. He forced himself to read every day. He picked up Tolkein, Hemingway, and Vidal. But the books he treasured most were the thrillers by

Robert Ludlum and Tom Clancy. The week before he was to enter Officer Candidate School, Flynn was medically disqualified from military service. He got a job as a sales rep for Kraft foods—"my training," he calls it today. "If I could sell a box of grape nuts, I could sell my own book," he tells *TAC*. After rejection letters piled up, Flynn self-published *Term Limits* in 1997. His hustling pushed up sales in his home state of Minnesota. Publishers noticed, and he signed his first book contract within months. A decade and ten million copies later, his name is printed larger than the title of the books. His jacket photo is so large that it could be worn as a mask.

Flynn works to keep up his expert status. He now takes trips to the Middle East to do research. He assures audiences he has "had to change some things in the books because my contacts have told me I'm too close to the truth." He tells me that a friend at the FBI once told him, "You've got the luxury of sitting down in a room for six hours a day for six months thinking about this stuff. We're lucky if we get one breakout session a month to sit down and brainstorm about plots. These books help raise our awareness. They help us think of stuff that we haven't thought of." Flynn can almost anticipate your disbelief: how does a former salesman outthink the FBI? He disarms doubt by sharing it: "I can't believe where these books have taken me."

Flynn's image as a self-trained student of world affairs mirrors his hero's narrative. In Flynn's novels, Mitch Rapp is the only one whose mind is free of bureaucratic concerns. He doesn't care to please his superiors. His success can't be attributed to formal education but to clarity of moral purpose.

"How do I write about Washington when I live in Minnesota?" Flynn asks rhetorically. "I think it's an advantage. I don't get sucked into Washington."

When Rapp rails against political correctness, it is Flynn speaking through him: "I've just realized this in the last few years. He is my voice."

That voice may be dull, with its boring action set pieces. It may be annoyingly repetitive, with its talk-radio style denunciations of American weakness. But like popcorn flicks and radio sloganeering, it is a profitable business.

And in many ways, Flynn is endearing. With his open collar and crew cut, he has the beefy charm of a high-school football coach. His admiration for the people who left their homes to work in foreign countries after 9/11 is boundless. His fascination with spycraft is almost childlike. When Flynn says he is afraid Hollywood will "wussify" Rapp, he sounds like he is talking about a beloved action figure. The unsettling part of the Vince Flynn phenomenon is the way people respond to his books.

HIS FASCINATION WITH SPYCRAFT IS ALMOST CHILDLIKE. WHEN FLYNN SAYS HE IS AFRAID HOLLYWOOD WILL "WUSSIFY" RAPP, HE SOUNDS LIKE HE IS TALKING ABOUT A BELOVED ACTION FIGURE.

According to Flynn, after reading one of his novels, then Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld, fearful that trade secrets were leaking, called up Mary Matalin, demanding, "How the hell do you know Vince Flynn?" White House Deputy Chief of Staff Joe Hagin reportedly dumped copies of Flynn's book *Transfer of Power* onto the desk in the White House Situation Room shortly after 9/11, telling subordinates to figure out what happens "if the s---t really hits the fan." That's the novel where terrorists violently raid the White House and penetrate the West Wing itself. Flynn can rattle off a list: "Heads of foreign intelligence agencies read these books. The King of Bahrain, King Abdullah of

Jordan, and Prime Minister Brown. It floors me that all these people are reading them. They walk away saying 'Hmm, this guy knows a lot.'"

Flynn even fancies that his books have informed military operations: "[CIA Director Porter] Goss and [Joint Special Operations Commander] Stan McChrystal tried to put together a raid in Afghanistan, a very elaborate thing. And it's virtually right out of the beginning of *Memorial Day*. And I know both these guys read these books. They were literally an hour away from starting, and Rumsfeld pulled the plug. It is bizarre—just like in the book."

Flynn is proud that the characters in Washington act like the figures in his books. But the rest of us should be frightened that our leaders rave like Vince Flynn. Since 9/11, Americans seem to have lived through a Mitch Rapp novel. Our vice president talks

like a cartoon villain about his fondness for "the dark side" of intelligence work. Our nation spirits away terrorists to secret prisons. Condoleezza Rice warned Americans that Saddam Hussein was developing nuclear weapons. He was—in Flynn's *Executive Power*.

These novels would make fine escapism, if we could escape them. But a large conservative audience confuses fantasy with reality. This failure to distinguish between fiction and fact is no small thing—it made the Iraq War possible. And after seven years of imaginary threats and bravado about torture, you worry that some poor spook is wandering around Saudi Arabia looking for a camel-shaped swimming pool. ■

Enemy of Our Enemy

Secular Syria's struggle with radical Islam should make it our ally, not our antagonist.

By Neil Clark

IT'S A MIDDLE EASTERN country where Christian celebrations are official state holidays and civil servants are allowed to take Sunday morning off to go to church, even though Sunday is a working day. A place where women can smoke and wear make-up and are active in public life. A country implacably opposed to Islamic fundamentalism and al-Qaeda and whose security forces helped foil a terrorist attack on the U.S. embassy.

No, not Israel. Syria.

The list of the outgoing Bush administration's foreign-policy errors is long, but not least among them is the way in which it has treated Syria—in many ways a natural ally—as a pariah.

Despite having a secular government led by a London-trained ophthalmologist who has a British-born wife, Syria was added to the Axis of Evil by Undersecretary of State John Bolton in May 2002. In 2003, Washington passed the Syria Accountability Act, which imposed economic sanctions on Damascus. And according to President Bush, Syria poses “an unusual and extraordinary threat to the national security, foreign policy, and economy” of the United States.

Then to add injury—and death—to insult, in October American forces launched an attack from Iraq on the Syrian village of Al-Sukkiraya. Eight people were killed. The U.S. claimed to have been targeting the network of al-Qaeda-linked foreign fighters moving through Syria into Iraq, but the Syrian government denounced the strike as “criminal and terrorist aggression.”

How can we account for the United States's extraordinary hostility to a country that has never threatened it? The answer is the baleful influence of our old friends the neocons.

Nothing better illustrates the fundamental deceit that underpins neoconservatism. If defeating radical Islam really were the name of the game, as Podhoretz, Feith, Wolfowitz, and company insist, then the U.S. would surely have been building bridges with Damascus instead of treating it as an outcast. For Syria's problem with Islamic militancy predates America's.

Since the Ba'athist takeover in 1963, the Syrian regime has come under pressure from radical Islamists who dislike its socialistic, secularist policies, its empowerment of women, and the dominance of the Alawites, a group previously considered the underclass in the country. In 1973, there were violent demonstrations against planned changes in the constitution that proposed allowing non-Muslims to be head of state. Extremists assassinated prominent members of the regime and the Alawite sect.

Then in 1979 came the bloody massacre of 83 cadets at the military academy in Aleppo, followed by terrorist attacks in other Syrian cities. Three years later, there was a violent Islamic uprising in the town of Hama, in which Ba'athists were attacked and murdered. The government's response was brutal: up to 30,000 people were killed as the army, under President Hafez al-Assad's brother, attempted to restore order.

The threat that radical Islamists pose to the secular regime has receded since the early 1980s, but it has not gone away. The car bombing of a Shia shrine by jihadists in Damascus in September, which killed 17 people, was the third such attack this year.

I first visited Syria in 1999, during the last year of the 29-year rule of Assad *père*. With its state-owned self-service cafeterias, socialist-style public buildings, and East German-made trains, the country reminded me more of the communist states in Eastern Europe I had seen in the 1980s than a predominantly Islamic Middle Eastern state.

While the Syrians I met could not have been friendlier or more hospitable, there was no disguising the totalitarian nature of the regime. Pictures of Hafez al-Assad hung everywhere. An extraordinary number of people wore military uniforms, including in the universities I visited: a state of emergency has existed since the Ba'athists came to power.

If that all sounds pretty grim, there is, thankfully, another side to the story. The Ba'athists have undoubtedly brought stability to a country divided along religious and tribal lines, as well as considerable economic and social progress. In my travels in Syria, I did not see the abject poverty that exists in most other countries in the region. The government's secularism means that most members of religious minorities, such as the Alawites, Druze, Christians, and Isma'ilis, support the regime. “We support the government here because if it

was toppled the Islamists would rule,” a young female academic at the University of Latakia told me. The parallels with neighboring Iraq—and the ethnic and religious strife that engulfed the country when the secular Ba’athist regime was toppled there—are all too obvious.

Assad, the wily old “Lion of Damascus,” died in June 2000. Since then, under the leadership of his shy, soft-spoken son, Bashar, hundreds of political prisoners have been released and some media restrictions have been lifted. Syria may still be along way from a model Jeffersonian democracy, but it’s certainly a less totalitarian society than it was a decade ago. Yet Washington’s attitude toward the Arab republic has only hardened.

Syria was castigated for opposing the illegal invasion of Iraq, even though the war was opposed by almost all Syrians. Then when Saddam’s WMD couldn’t be found, neocons advanced the ludicrous fiction that Iraq’s stockpile had been moved to Syria just prior to the invasion.

Syria’s military presence in neighboring Lebanon came in for renewed attack when Lebanese President Rafik Hariri was assassinated in Beirut in February 2005. The neocons lost little time pointing the finger of blame at Damascus, even though the political upheaval caused by the killing was to Syria’s great detriment.

The country’s great crime in the neocons’ eyes is not its poor human-rights record—human rights in “friendly” countries such as Jordan and Egypt do not seem to concern them unduly—nor its involvement in Lebanon. No, they resent Syria for its refusal to accept U.S.-Israeli hegemony in the region and for its support of the Palestinians.

When Washington’s hawks accuse Syria of being a “destabilizing” force, they are referring to Syria’s patronage of both Hamas, the winners of the 2006

elections in Palestine, and Hezbollah, the paramilitary organization formed to resist the Israeli invasion of Lebanon in 1982. Both groups are regarded as terrorist organizations for their attacks on Israeli civilians and security forces, and their violent acts should be condemned. But the U.S. makes a mistake when it conflates Damascus’s support for groups it views as resisting a regional hegemon with the sponsorship of Islamic terrorism generally—much less Islamic terror directed against America.

Yet ironically, while neocons continue to foam at the mouth whenever Syria is mentioned, Israel—the country they most admire in the region—is itself adopting a more pragmatic approach to its neighbor. In May, it was announced that Israel and Syria were engaged in indirect negotiations, carried out through Turkish mediators, for a comprehensive peace treaty. Realists in Tel Aviv accept that there can be no lasting peace in the region without some arrangement with Syria—a peace deal that could involve Israel handing back the Golan Heights, which they have held since 1967, and making concessions on Palestine in return for Syrian recognition of Israel and a commitment to use their influence to rein in Hezbollah and Hamas.

And while Syria continues to be lambasted by laptop bombardiers in Washington, it’s been receiving plaudits from those closer to the action. Late last year, then top American commander in Iraq Gen. David Petraeus praised Syria for taking steps to reduce the flow of foreign fighters through its borders with Iraq.

Moreover, neocon attempts to isolate Syria are proving increasingly unsuccessful. In July, President Assad made a high-profile visit to France, which in 2005 had cut off diplomatic relations with Syria. Six weeks later, Nicolas Sarkozy, the man whose eleva-

tion to the Champs-Élysées the neocons hoped would reposition French foreign policy to their liking, became the first Western head of state to visit Damascus in five years. And in October, Syrian Foreign Minister Walid Al-Muallem flew to London to meet with his British counterpart, David Miliband, for talks.

It was during this visit that the U.S. attack on Syria took place, leading some analysts to claim that the raid was designed to counter diplomatic moves to bring Syria in from the cold: “a final vengeful lunge against a country that others are now wooing but which still attracts profound hostility in Washington,” as the *Guardian*’s Middle East editor, Ian Black, put it.

But while diplomatic approaches to Damascus are welcome, it is important that the West engages with Syria for the right reasons. Renewing relations merely to isolate Iran, its longstanding ally, would only make an attack on Tehran—and a potentially catastrophic Middle East conflict—more likely. It is in America’s interest to build a new, positive relationship with Damascus for its own sake: Syria has done the U.S. no harm and has the same desire to counter Islamic fundamentalism.

During the recent presidential elections we heard a lot from the Obama camp about the need for change. A visit from the new U.S. president to Damascus and a return invitation to Bashar al-Assad to visit Washington, together with the repeal of the Syria Accountability Act and the adoption of a new, less aggressive tone toward Syria, would go some way to showing that the new administration really does want to make a clean break from the disastrous foreign policies of George W. Bush. ■

Neil Clark is a journalist specializing in Middle Eastern affairs.

God Save the King

Could it happen here in Britain? Could someone like Barack Obama occupy the highest office in the land? Certainly. The Prince of Wales may not be black, but like

Obama, he springs from fairly recent immigrant stock. His father, the Duke of Edinburgh, was born in Corfu, in 1921, into the Danish-German House of Schleswig-Holstein-Sonderburg-Glücksburg. To Greeks and Danes he is known as Philippos of Greece and Denmark and to Londoners as "Phil the Greek."

The royal family is quite as exotic as Obama's family, perhaps more so. From the accession of George I, Elector of Hanover, in 1714, until the middle of the 20th century, it was predominantly German. During World War I, however, the German connection became an embarrassment, and in 1917, George V, Elizabeth II's grandfather, decided that it would be politic to change the family name from Saxe-Coburg-Gotha, which had replaced Hanover when Queen Victoria married Prince Albert in 1840, to plain old Windsor. The Kaiser, who was George's cousin, made a joke about "The Merry Wives of Saxe-Coburg-Gotha." How we fell about.

It is now beginning to look as though the House of Windsor will soon become a thoroughly British institution. Charles, who turned 60 this month, is only about a quarter German, his late grandmother having been a Scot. Elizabeth II, furthermore, though technically half German, is wholly British. She has been a gracious queen and has almost always observed constitutional form by keeping schtum on sensitive political matters.

The other day, though, on behalf of all her subjects, she asked a professor at the London School of Economics why nobody had noticed the howling reces-

sion that was heading our way. When the professor replied that at "every stage, someone was relying on somebody else and everyone thought they were doing the right thing," Her Majesty responded with one majestic word: "Awful."

When he succeeds to the throne, the Prince of Wales is likely to be less scrupulous than his mother about staying out of controversy, and we may therefore hope that he will continue to campaign against modern architecture, factory farming, agribusiness, and global warming.

Still, there's no rush. Queen Elizabeth is only 82 and looks like sticking around for a while yet. Time is on Charles's side. It is not on Obama's, however, and that is a key difference between the two men. In 2010, the president will have to start campaigning for a second term, and if he's going to make that "change"—if he's going to get "there"—he'll have to move fast. Perhaps it is not my place to speculate what form "change" might take, but since Obama claims to represent the world, I may as well say that I have profound misgivings. My fear is that change will simply mean more of the same: more abortion, more war, more puppies.

With Charles it will be different. As king, he will have no mandate from the people, no manifesto pledges to keep (or to ignore). He'll not be able to do what he pleases, of course—a constitutional monarch is more constrained by checks and balances than an American president—but within limits he will be

able to do and say what he thinks is right.

Let's go back a few years. On a bitterly cold January afternoon in 1649, Charles's illustrious forebear and namesake, Charles I, stood on the scaffold in Whitehall and, before he was beheaded for "treason," declared that he was "the martyr of the people." Few would go along with that assessment today, but I am still moved by the words he spoke on that terrible occasion:

[As for the people,] truly I desire their liberty and freedom as much as anybody whomsoever; but I must tell you that their liberty and freedom consist in having of government, those laws by which their life and their goods may be most their own. It is not for having share in government, sirs; that is nothing pertaining to them; a subject and a sovereign are clear different things.

Charles I was no saint. Even so, I take comfort from the continued existence, albeit in diluted form, of the hereditary principle he upheld. No doubt democracy is the least worst system of government we have, but at least monarchy provides a refuge for those who feel oppressed by the liberal consensus—whether of Left or Right—and revolted by their elected representatives, such men as execute kings and make war on the past.

Reality check. We don't live in the Magic Kingdom. We live in the real world, and what I am looking forward to in the real world is Charles's first official visit to Barack Obama's great republic and to the television pictures of him doing the Lindy Hop with Michelle in the White House ballroom. God bless the Prince of Wales. ■

Left Turn Ahead

William Appleman Williams and Gabriel Kolko impart vital lessons for the Right.

By Dylan Hales

CONSERVATIVES HAVE LONG taken for granted their place on the right of the political spectrum. But as the organized Right, in the form of the Republican Party, has hitched its wagon to big business and big government in the decades since World War II, some unconventional voices on the American Left have spoken up for the traditionally conservative causes of decentralism, prudent government, and foreign-policy restraint. This “left conservatism” owes its name to Norman Mailer, but it has deep roots in American history. And now that so much of the official Right has been co-opted by advocates of a materialistic consumer culture—to be maintained by a military empire—the time may be ripe for conservatives to look in a new direction.

They might begin by turning to William Appleman Williams and Gabriel Kolko. Williams, the pre-eminent historian of American diplomacy, served as ideological godfather to the New Left of the 1960s and '70s while teaching at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. Kolko, who was influenced by Williams, has long been an incisive critic of the Progressive Era and its relationship to the American empire. Both men spent their entire careers on the Left, yet their arguments more often parallel the small-town conservatism of the Old Right than the corporate ideology of conventional liberalism.

While Williams and Kolko were noninterventionists in foreign policy, they were decidedly realistic in their tone and approach. Instead of grounding their anti-

imperialism on typical Leftist complaints about collateral damage, both men focused their criticisms on the consequences of military adventurism on the character of the United States. Taking a decidedly America First tack, Williams went so far as to suggest that the American imperial mindset was a greater threat to its own citizens than to the denizens of the Third World:

[T]he cost of empire is not properly tabulated in the dead and maimed, or in the wasted resources, but rather in the loss of our vitality as citizens. We have increasingly eased to participate in the process of self-government. ... Finally we deny any responsibility; and as part of that ultimate abdication of our birthright, indignantly deny that the United States is or ever was an empire.

Williams noted that by the turn of the 20th century American culture “had been unable, after almost 300 years, to develop any conception of success—or fulfillment—except the idiom of the endless chase itself.” Imperialism, for Williams, was thus not just a matter of foreign policy. It also meant “the loss of sovereignty—control—over essential issues and decisions by a largely agricultural society to an industrial metropolis” here at home, and Williams feared it might be an ineradicable part of our modern way of life. Still, Williams distinguished between the “soft imperialism” of diplomacy and military preparedness and the “hard imperialism” of overt con-

quest. The prophets of “soft imperialism” were not bleeding-heart liberals or supporters of the New Deal; they were men like John Quincy Adams and the hero of Williams’s work, the realist and internationalist Herbert Hoover.

Williams saw Hoover’s statecraft as the thoughtful work of an American patriot who was interested in maintaining Americans’ standards of living without sacrificing undue amounts of blood and treasure. Believing that his countrymen understood “freedom” as an ideal inextricably linked with material abundance, Williams was at his pragmatic best when describing nonviolent approaches to securing foreign markets. Admittedly, any attempt to resurrect the legacy of Herbert Hoover would be a massive undertaking, and a lesser scholar than Williams might have been accused of contrarianism for trying to redeem the 29th president’s reputation. But Williams was undeterred.

Salvaging Hoover was not Williams’s only noble, if quixotic, project. He also advocated a return to the Articles of Confederation. Not only did he see the U.S. under the Articles as a relatively anti-imperial era, he also believed that the strong localism made possible under the Articles was the only form of governance suitable to real Americans living real lives. Williams’s belief that the Articles were “grounded in the idea and ideal of self-determined communities” is perfectly consistent both with the anti-imperial philosophy of the New Left and the Old Right’s traditional conservatism of hearth and home.

For Gabriel Kolko, the enemy has always been what sociologist Max Weber called “political capitalism”—that is, “the accumulation of private capital and fortunes via booty connected with politics.” In Kolko’s eyes, “America’s capacity and readiness to intervene virtually anywhere” pose a grave danger both to the U.S. and the world. Kolko has made it his mission to study the historical roots of how this propensity for intervention came to be. He was also one of the first historians to take on the regulatory state in a serious way. Kolko’s

Kolko remains a quasi-Marxist to this day, but his writing represents a kind of fusionism—not of so much of Left and Right as of libertarianism and populism. At times he even sounds like the “Jeffersonian conservative” historian Clyde Wilson. Kolko can also bring to mind the 18th-century agrarian John Taylor of Caroline, whom Wilson once described as representing “both a conservative allegiance to local community and inherited ways and a radical-populist suspicion of capitalism, ‘progress,’ government and routine logrolling politics.”

American excess, or to paraphrase the title of Williams’s most overtly political work, “empire” became “a way of life” for much of the American Right. But the real targets of left-wing scholars Kolko and Williams are not libertarians and individualists of the Old Right or even the small-town conservatism of Russell Kirk or the Nashville Agrarians. On the contrary: these varieties of Left and conservative are more in agreement with one another than not. They are de facto allies in a war against empire, bigness, and the most pernicious doctrine of them all, American Exceptionalism.

THESE VARIETIES OF LEFT AND CONSERVATIVE ARE MORE IN AGREEMENT WITH ONE ANOTHER THAN NOT. THEY ARE DE FACTO ALLIES IN A WAR AGAINST EMPIRE, BIGNESS, AND AMERICAN EXCEPTIONALISM.

Outlining the conservative worth of Williams and Kolko is neither hard nor foolhardy for any serious man of the Right. Libertarian historian Ralph Raico has leaned heavily on the works of both men, and conservative foreign-policy scholar Andrew J. Bacevich has asked the same questions about “American freedom and American abundance” as Williams, a man who laid the groundwork for much of his analysis. The reluctance of many conservatives to find common cause with men of the Left who just happen to be right—on some of the most pressing issues of our age—is a habit of mind well worth breaking.

Nearly 30 years ago, Williams asked if it was “possible to create and sustain a democratic culture without conquering or otherwise controlling and wasting a grossly inequitable share of social space and resources?” As the Republic of old continues to crumble and the GOP descends further into corruption and authoritarianism, it may be time for those on the Right to set their prejudices aside and ask a pressing question of their own: “What is Left?” ■

landmark work, *The Triumph of Conservatism*, is an attempt to link the Progressive Era policies of Theodore Roosevelt to the national-security state left behind in the wake of his cousin Franklin’s presidency.

Kolko’s indictment of what he calls “conservatism” is not aimed at the Southern Agrarianism of Richard Weaver or the Old Right individualism of Albert Jay Nock. In fact, Kolko’s thesis—that big government and big business consistently colluded to regulate small American artisans and farmers out of existence—has much in common with libertarian and traditionalist critiques of the corporatist state. The “national progressivism” that Kolko attacks was, in his own words, “the defense of business against the democratic ferment that was nascent in the states.” Coming of age in the ’50s and ’60s, Kolko saw firsthand the destruction of the “permanent things” as the result of the merging of Washington, D.C. and Wall Street. A sense of place and rootedness lingers just beneath the surface of his work.

The Triumph of Conservatism and other works of Kolko’s scholarship furnish a poignant reminder that the original progressives of Theodore Roosevelt’s time were big-city bureaucrats and elitist Republicans, and that wing of the GOP has a long history of enthusiasm for American militarism. Under the proud banner of President William McKinley, Republicans developed a foreign policy grounded firmly on the principles of empire, substituting a global Manifest Destiny in place of the Monroe Doctrine. “Progressive Republican”—John McCain notwithstanding—is a label altogether out of fashion today. But the movement conservatism that overtook the Republican Party during the Cold War now pursues a foreign policy every bit as interventionist as TR’s progressivism.

To Kolko and Williams, this Cold War mindset was just the most recent manifestation of the quest for unlimited growth that has so grossly altered the landscape of American life for so long. Foreign policy became a fulfillment of

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Chinese Lessons

FOR DECADES, before a heedless congregation, some of us have preached the old Hamiltonian gospel.

Great nations do not have trade partners. They have trade competitors and rivals. Trade surpluses are superior to trade deficits. Tariffs on foreign goods are preferable to taxes on U.S. producers. Manufacturing, not finance, is the muscle of the nation. Economic independence is vital to political independence.

Following Hamiltonian precepts, the United States grew from 13 rural and agricultural colonies into the greatest industrial power in all history, producing 42 percent of the world's manufactured goods. We were the awe and envy of mankind, the self-sufficient Republic, maker of half of the armaments produced by all the nations in World War II. That is the America we grew up in, which has now vanished.

Chrysler, Ford, perhaps GM, may be dying. Manufacturing has sunk to 10 percent of U.S. employment, a level unseen since before the Civil War. Europeans and Asians assembled in Washington this month to impose upon the United States a New World Economic Order like the one we imposed on them at Bretton Woods in 1944. Such are the fruits of free-trade ideology.

Across the Pacific, a nation that studied how America rose, and watched as America declined, chose a different path. China adopted and pursued a China First policy of economic nationalism.

In July, Charles McMillion of MBG Services testified to the U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission on China's progress.

Beijing began its rise by devaluing its currency 45 percent in 1994, slashing the prices of exports in half and making imports twice as expensive. As America

threw open her market and invited China to come in and capture it, China erected a Great Wall around her own.

Results: China's worldwide trade surplus in manufactures, \$31 billion in 2001, hit \$401 billion in 2007—a 1,300 percent increase—and may reach \$500 billion in 2008. China has shoved Germany aside to become the world's greatest exporter and now leads the world in the export of manufactured goods to Japan, the European Union, and the United States.

While running trade deficits with Asian neighbors like Taiwan to tie them politically to Beijing, China is running record trade surpluses with the European Union and the United States, making America and the West as dependent upon China for our manufactures as we are on OPEC for our oil.

Chinese auto production has quintupled since 2001. She now produces more cars than Germany and may exceed the United States in 2009. While Chinese auto exports are still heavily in parts, finished cars are coming soon to a dealer near you. The Chinese will likely run the sword through the last standing member of America's Big Three.

Before 2004, China's manufacturing trade surplus with America was largely in textiles and apparel. But since then, China's rocketing trade surplus in electronics, computers, and parts has far exceeded her surplus in textiles and apparel.

China's trade surplus in computers and components rose from \$8.1 billion in 2001 to \$73.5 billion in 2007. In cellular phones and parts, her worldwide trade surplus grew from \$3 billion in 2003 to \$50 billion in 2007, and may reach \$60 billion by year's end.

China still imports commercial airliners. But she now has a large and growing

trade surplus in airplane parts. This follows the pattern in textiles, computers, and autos. First, the Chinese learn by assembling parts in factories in China. China begins to produce the parts. Then China produces the finished products and goes out to capture the world market, while protecting her own by keeping her currency cheap.

On items the Commerce Department categorizes as Advanced Technology Products, America began running a trade deficit for the first time early in the George W. Bush years. China now exports to us four times as much, in dollar value, in ATP items as we sell to Beijing.

As America mothballs the shuttle, relying on Russian rockets to get our astronauts back up to a space station we built, China is putting men into space and heading for the moon.

Since America ushered China into the World Trade Organization in 2002, Beijing's growth rate has been four times that of the United States, accelerating from an average 10 percent of gross domestic product to 12 percent in 2007.

With her immense trade surpluses, China's reserves have surged from \$200 billion in 2002 to \$2 trillion. Awash in dollars, Beijing now waits patiently, writes McMillion, to cherry-pick the crown jewels of America's industrial empire—"patents, talents, natural resources, brands"—at fire-sale prices in the global crash.

As America plunges into recession and our industry hollows out, while China is still growing at 9 percent, as the 20th century's greatest creditor nation now borrows from Beijing to pay for booster shots for its sick economy, we may hear once again the Bush-Clinton refrain about how the terrible danger we all face is from "protectionism." ■

America's Judge

The creator of "Beavis and Butthead" turns his wit on multicultural liberalism.

By A.G. Gancarski

WHATEVER THE TYPICAL background might be for an animator and film director, odds are Mike Judge's isn't it. The Ecuadorian-born auteur's searingly satirical insights about contemporary America are all the more remarkable for his life's journey, a winding road that took him from a physics degree at University of California, San Diego to a stint as an engineer then bar-band musician before he taught himself animation using library books. His rise from such improbable origins is even more notable given the intense resistance to his work, from grandstanding U.S. senators and his corporate patrons at Fox.

Despite critical acclaim and commercial success, Judge has opted to live outside of paparazzi circles. The down-to-earth 45-year-old maintains a residence in Austin, Texas, where he conducts himself as a regular guy. A 2006 *Esquire* interview revealed a stoic, deliberately unassuming type who watches hunting instructional videos, walks around his neighborhood twice a day, frequents his local Starbucks, and "like[s] the suburbs." Like David Lynch, the famously Reaganophilic director of dark comedies such as "Blue Velvet" and "Twin Peaks," Mike Judge has a fundamentally localist, conservative bent imparted on the slant, increasingly in spite of the agendas of the corporate monoliths that release his work.

When MTV introduced "Beavis and Butthead" to its lineup in 1993, it immediately stood out from any other cartoon marketed on a mass level. Its crude figures and equally crude plots typified a

nihilist desolation particular to the strip mall and subdivision universe. The protagonists—slow-witted adolescent scions of worn-out single mothers with no clue how to teach these halfwits how to be men—were the natural products of their unnatural habitat.

This was the first show of any sort to address directly such suburbanite childhoods without sentimentality or a misplaced desire to impart moral lessons. A central premise involved the hapless duo's attempts to "score" with "sluts," who were clearly younger versions of their own mothers. Deprived of masculine role models, except for a mouth-breather named Todd, a twentysomething neighborhood thug, Beavis and Butthead were hopeless figures: futureless metalhead high schoolers, divested of any sense of their own histories, ignorant to the core. To compensate for their environmental and genetic handicaps, they did what a generation of throw-away teens did: watched toxic amounts of television. Especially music videos.

Here was incredible humor laden with tragic subtext. Rendering commentary on Black Box and Ugly Kid Joe videos was the closest either got to critical thinking, which suggested that in spite of the obvious, MTV-friendly humor of the show, there was pathos at the heart of "Beavis and Butthead." They were failed by parents, teachers, the community at large. They never had a chance. So they became passive recipients of pop culture—a trope that has recurred in Judge's work throughout the years.

"King of the Hill," Judge's subsequent project, finds an antecedent in Judge's own experience. "I had a paper route that was sort of in a blue-collar neighborhood with lots of Texas transplants, so early on I had these kinds of characters around me," he recalled in a 2006 interview. "[A]fter Beavis and Butthead, I had done a panel cartoon; I just had this image of just four guys with beers standing out in front of the fence, kind of like I used to see when I'd look out my kitchen window, and I just drew them all saying, 'Yep, yep, yep.'"

The early episodes of "King of the Hill" bore considerable resemblance to Judge's first show, down to lead character Hank's voice recycling the previous show's Mr. Anderson. Simple animation and defiantly two-dimensional characterizations made the first few years seem more redneck than recent seasons: Hank's lament about his son—"That boy's not right!"—hasn't surfaced nearly as much in later episodes. Both Hank and his hometown of Arlen have become more "citified."

Like Judge's first show, "King of the Hill" directly addresses the eroded state of American masculinity. Hank's oft-mentioned "narrow urethra" and his eternally complicated relationships with his son and late father, along with the failings of Hank's neighbors and lifelong friends—the cuckold Dale Gribble, the son of a gay rodeo cowboy; the eternally jilted Army barber Bill Dauterive; the mumble-mouthed skirtchaser Boomhauer—flesh out the program's critique of the declining status of the white male in contemporary America. It is no accident that the

representative native American—John Redcorn, the biological father of Dale’s teenage son—is the show’s primary exponent of male virility. Likewise, it is uncoincidental that Arlen’s elite is comprised increasingly of southeast Asian immigrants. White people have been superseded, boiled down into the melting pot. There is no “white skin privilege” for these “inconsequential bottom dwellers,” as they are called in one episode. The white guys on “King of the Hill” are flawed, ordinary men imbued with sadness—Hank most of all.

Hank exemplifies the Mike Judge everyman, rooted in duty to God, country, and family, to his job, his beloved Arlen, and his Dallas Cowboys. Hank embodies the Texan code: he is a localist of the highest order. He wants the world to stay as it was in his sepia-tinged memory, where Tom Landry is still coaching the Cowboys, where Reagan is still president, and it is always morning in America. But he knows, deep down, it’s all lost.

Understanding Hank Hill’s traditionalism is key to appreciating the points Judge has made in his two most recent films, the settings of which make Arlen look idyllic.

His 1999 “Office Space” offered a blistering satire of the corporate world in the era of Clintonian “rightsizing.” The protagonist, a thirtyish cubicle drone named Peter Gibbons, labors without distinction at a company called Initech, where he is condescended to by his sleazy, Porsche-driving yuppie boss. His personal life is no better: his goldigger girlfriend is as faithful as a feral cat. He works weekends, consumed by constant demands to do scut work like “put new cover sheets on the TPS reports.”

As Initech restructures and Gibbons’s layoff looms, his girlfriend takes him to a hypnotherapist, who has a heart attack and keels over. The death is treated in the fashion of many of Judge’s minor character deaths, as seemingly incidental.

Post hypnotism, though, Gibbons is liberated from the stresses that plagued him when he was a company man. For a while, his story breezes along like “The Secret of My Success.” But as so often happens to Judge characters when things go well, Gibbons’s newfound confidence metastasizes into a catastrophic hubris when he launches an ill-fated embezzlement scheme with his jettisoned coworkers.

“Office Space” depicts a world far removed from Arlen, Texas, where Hank Hill is able to devote himself unironically to selling “propane and propane accessories.” Nonetheless, it is identifiably part of Judge’s narrative universe, containing allusions to prior projects. Gibbons, for instance, lives in the Morningwood Apartments—“morning wood” being a central concern of the libidinous Beavis and Butthead.

HANK EXEMPLIFIES THE MIKE JUDGE EVERYMAN, ROOTED IN DUTY TO GOD, COUNTRY, AND FAMILY, TO HIS JOB, HIS BELOVED ARLEN, AND HIS DALLAS COWBOYS.

The final scene depicts an at-ease Gibbons, beatifically working with his red-neck neighbor, who would not have been out of place on either of Judge’s animated series, reconstructing the Initech building that was burned down by a disgruntled coworker. The redemption in hard, honest work is an ending Hank Hill would have appreciated.

Judge’s most recent movie, 2006’s “Idiocracy,” represents a marked departure in setting and narrative technique, even as the film recapitulates many of the director’s earlier themes.

The central character, Private Joe Bowers, is yet another Judge everyman—“the most average soldier in the Army.” He is picked, along with a prostitute, to serve as part of a military experiment. The subjects are deposited into coffin-like pods for a deep freeze, with

the intention of retrieving them in a year. But as it turns out, the base is decommissioned, a Fuddruckers is built on the grounds, and the experiment is forgotten—until the Great Garbage Avalanche of 2505 liberates Bowers and the street-walker from their pods into a dystopian mess still called America. Bowers turns out to be the smartest man in the world.

And what a world it is. As the narrator asserts, “the English language had deteriorated into a hybrid of hillbilly, valley girl, inner-city slang and various grunts.” The culture has likewise deteriorated, becoming ridiculously coarsened and entirely familiar. Beavis and Butthead would thrive.

A ubiquitous Gatorade ripoff called “Brawndo” abounds, dual-purposed for water fountains and crop irrigation, while the name of the aforementioned Fuddruckers has morphed into a certain

scatological variant. Along those lines, Starbucks has addressed its spate of store closings by offering Frappuccinos topped with “happy endings.” H&R Block likewise has found ways to impart a Triple X ethos into the 1040 form.

The morally bankrupt, subliterate, and subhuman 26th-century society sees law degrees doled out to slackjaws at Costco and justice meted out on the WWE-like “Monday Night Rehab.” The modest Methodist churches attended by Christian stoics like Hank Hill? Gone forever, along with the quiet faith contained within and the spiritual quandaries that it addresses. Judge’s point is unmistakable. This is where we’re headed. And it may not take centuries to get there.

Like all of Judge’s work, “Idiocracy”

Continued on page 34

Arts & Letters

FILM

[Happy-Go-Lucky]

Unbearable Lightness

By Steve Sailer

"HAPPY-GO-LUCKY," five-time Oscar nominee Mike Leigh's "quirky" and "off-beat" comedy about a young London schoolteacher who is, yes, happy-go-lucky, has enjoyed the most unanimous critical acclaim of any film this year. All 31 "Top Critics" on the Rotten Tomatoes website have given "Happy-Go-Lucky" their personal thumbs up. Indeed, star Sally Hawkins has a shot at an Oscar nomination because Academy members like to vote for obscure British actresses in low-budget movies nobody has seen, such as Imelda Staunton's Best Actress nod for Leigh's last film, "Vera Drake."

Leigh, a Best Director nominee for 1996's "Secrets and Lies," prides himself on improvising slice-of-life left-wing movies about the English working class, which this Royal Academy of the Dramatic Arts graduate knows all about because his physician father had proletarian patients.

Since he doesn't work from a script, investors are cautious about investing in Leigh's vague ideas. "My tragedy as a filmmaker now," he declaims, "is that there is a very limited ceiling on the amount of money anyone will give me to make a film." So the British National Lottery obligingly kicked in some of "Happy-Go-Lucky's" budget.

Lotteries are notoriously a tax on stupidity; evidently, they are also a subsidy for vapidty because "Happy-Go-Lucky" is the worst movie by a prominent director since M. Night Shyamalan's allergy allegory "The Happening." Leigh's film is smug, boring, plotless, and pointless, the perfect embodiment of the Obama Era of liberal self-congratulation.

To Leigh, Hawkins's character, Poppy, is as adorable as the two Audrey's: Tatou in "Amélie" and Hepburn in "Breakfast at Tiffany's." To me, Hawkins is insufferable. Imagine a "Star Wars" prequel in which a female Jar-Jar Binks hogs the screen for the entire two hours. Poppy smirks, snickers, and sniggers, mugging like Jim Varney in those old "Hey Vern" movies, an overgrown class clown laughing relentlessly at her own jokes, which are never, ever funny.

There's nothing more excruciating than watching people onscreen laugh, especially when they crack themselves up. What's really amusing is seeing characters mortified with embarrassment. In general, happy people aren't very funny and funny people aren't very happy.

And how exactly did Poppy, a North Londoner, acquire her quasi-Australian accent? Her youngest sister, a drunken law student, talks like Sid Vicious, but Poppy sounds like the Crocodile Hunter. In a male actor, a working-class Australian accent sounds manly yet affable—that's why the U.S.-born Mel Gibson normally plays his American roles with an unexplained hint of Down Under in his voice—but in a woman it just sounds tomboyish and goofy.

Most of Leigh's movies have been about the oppression of the proletariat, but by 2008 their values are apparently ascendant in London. Any character who thinks about the future—such as

Poppy's one married, home-owning sister—is scorned as a buzz-kill.

Most people in "Happy-Go-Lucky" have pleasant government jobs. Judging from this movie, the British welfare state exists mostly so people with soft college degrees can have some place to hang out while making plans about which pub or disco to go to after work.

The only plot device consists of Poppy's weekly driving lessons with a tightly wound little fundamentalist Christian with bad teeth, played by Eddie Marsan. I initially assumed these two equally unattractive single people would wind up settling for each other, but when he insists she lock the car doors when two black youths walk by, he demonstrates—in Leigh's mental universe—that he is morally unworthy of her and probably a dangerous psycho to boot.

Instead, Leigh hooks her up with a school social worker, who is played by a ludicrously handsome young actor who looks like one of those towering Olympic swimming medalists with massively masculine jawlines molded by years of Human Growth Hormone abuse.

One vignette of this momentum-free movie unwittingly exemplifies the female cluelessness that has made Britain's schools a dystopia of juvenile male thuggishness. When one of her students starts punching other boys, does Poppy punish him? No, she signs the bully up for counseling, which consists of three adults—the headmistress, Poppy, and her future boyfriend—sitting around praising the little lout and asking him what's the *real* reason he hits people. Actual answer: it's fun. ■

Rated R for language.

BOOKS

[*The Ascent of Money: A Financial History of the World*, Niall Ferguson, Penguin Press, 432 pages]

Hedge Fund Historian

By Philip Delves Broughton

MENTION THE NAME Niall Ferguson to many historians and economists and instantly their countenances cloud. The hyperactivity of the Laurence A. Tisch Professor of History at Harvard University, William Ziegler Professor of Business Administration at Harvard Business School, Senior Research Fellow of Jesus College, Oxford, and Senior Fellow of the Hoover Institution, Stanford drives his rivals to despair. And this is before you mention his roles as television broadcaster and consultant to GLG, one of the world's largest hedge funds. The man acquires glittering prizes the way Michael Phelps does medals. Toss in the thick head of hair, the Scottish bass, and the unbuttoned shirts he wears on television, and you have the young Sean Connery of academia.

Ferguson also has a knack for inserting himself volubly into the most important issues of the day. His back-to-back books *Empire*, a history of the British empire, and *Colossus*, about the American empire, were published in 2003 and 2004 as the world argued over the nature, intentions, and future of American influence. With *The Ascent of Money*, Ferguson barges into the inferno of the global economic crisis.

Ferguson's aim is to trace the human story behind the evolution of finance, from ancient Mesopotamia to the world of hedge funds. He does so by leading us through the greatest hits of financial history. We see the Spanish in South America, mining precious metals and sending

them home to be converted into coin. Next come the Medicis, "more gangsters than bankers: a small-time clan, notable more for low violence than for high finance." Lorenzo the Magnificent, we learn, composed a song in the 1470s with the line "If you would be happy, be so. There is no certainty about tomorrow." As with modern finance, this book is dominated by the theme of risk and calculating the probability of events in an uncertain future.

There are detours into contemporary America. Ferguson visits Memphis, "America's bankruptcy capital," where people can escape or reduce their debts largely free of stigma or physical harm. "One of the great puzzles is that the world's most successful capitalist economy seems to be built on a foundation of easy economic failure," he writes. The bankruptcy system that was created to spur on risk-taking entrepreneurs, he finds, is now used mostly by people overwhelmed with personal debts. Americans' consumer debt has risen from 16 percent of disposable income in 1959 to 24 percent today.

Reverting to his historical thread, Ferguson describes the financial innovations of Nathan Rothschild, the founder of the House of Rothschild, who made a fortune betting on English bonds following Napoleon's defeat at Waterloo. Money, by this time, had gone from being coin and barter to what Adam Smith called "a sort of wagon-way through the air." Ferguson quotes Heinrich Heine, who said that the system of paper securities used by the Rothschilds "frees ... men to choose whatever place of residence they like; they can live anywhere, without working, from the interest on their bonds, their portable property, and so they gather together and constitute the true power of our capital cities."

This first half of the book is Ferguson on autopilot, providing interesting historical instances of financial insanity. We have the juicy tale of John Law, the Scottish chancer who wrested control of France's finances under Louis XIV. Law not only controlled tax collection and the issuance of bank notes but the giant Mis-

issippi Company, which traded with France's American territories: "It was as if one man was simultaneously running all five hundred of the top U.S. corporations, the U.S. Treasury and the Federal Reserve System." Law kept issuing shares in the Mississippi Company to investors, who snapped them up with money lent to them by Law through the Banque Royale. When the bubble popped, Law ruined investors across Europe and many of the French aristocracy, sowing the seeds of the French Revolution.

Ferguson also hustles us through the hyperinflationary hell of Weimar Germany, Argentina's long economic decline, the savings and loan scandal, and Enron. There is a wonderfully creepy cameo by Jeff Skilling, Enron's fallen CEO, who said, "I've thought about this a lot, and all that matters is money. ... You buy loyalty with money. This touchy-feely stuff isn't as important as cash. That's what drives performance."

Where the book becomes more interesting and timely, however, is when Ferguson comes to the subject of housing. He takes the position that the idea of home ownership as an irrefutable good is nonsensical. He points to the dramatic rise in mortgage debt in the United States, from 38 percent of GDP in 1956, to 98 percent in 2006. A regular income, he argues, is a far more reliable source of financial security than a home. Buying a home you cannot afford makes no sense.

Yet he also points to the work of Hernando de Soto, the Peruvian economist, who has argued convincingly that property rights are the basis of a healthy economy. Establish rights to property, and people can get credit and begin to increase their wealth. What Ferguson fails to answer is where we are meant to draw the line. When exactly did we go from promoting the laudable goal of extending home-ownership to creating a monstrous housing bubble? Instead, he keeps serving up one-liners. In a section on the securitization of the mortgage market, he writes, "In a securitized market (just like in space) no one can hear you scream—because the interest you pay on your mortgage is ultimately

going to someone who has no idea you exist.” He visits Detroit, where he sees rows of foreclosed homes and comes up with a term to describe the America within America where millions are struggling to pay their mortgages: Subprimia. Where others see misery, Ferguson sees a neologism.

He further takes a baffling swipe at his Harvard colleague Henry Louis Gates for arguing that one of the keys to eradicating “black poverty and dysfunction” is the promulgation of a “middle-class ethic of success among the poor, while expanding opportunities for economic betterment,” such as home ownership.

Gates based his argument on his study of 20 successful African-Americans. He found that 15, including Oprah Winfrey and Whoopi Goldberg, were the descendants of slaves who had obtained property by 1920. The subprime crisis, Gates acknowledged, may have delayed the opportunities for poor blacks, but over the long term, owning property should be the goal.

Caught up in his analysis of the current crisis, Ferguson depicts Gates as

yet another dupe of the lending-broking complex. Yet Gates is in a sense right. Buying a home, provided you can afford it, is an excellent thing to do and a well-trodden escape from poverty.

But Ferguson is often too caught up in his own brilliance to recognize that others might have a point. In one Pooterish passage, he describes how he, as well as George Soros, predicted the collapse of the British pound in 1992. “I admit I have a vested interest in the events of Wednesday 16 September,” he writes. You can almost see the other members of the Faculty Club nodding off over their sherry as their preening junior colleague gets going. “In those days, moonlighting as a newspaper leader writer while I was a junior lecturer at Cambridge, I became convinced that speculators like Soros could beat the Bank of England if it came to a showdown. It was simple arithmetic. ... As it happened, the City editor of the newspaper I wrote for disagreed. That night, having been given something of a browbeating at the leader writers’ morning conference with the editor, I went to the English National Opera, to hear Verdi’s *The Force of Destiny*. It proved a highly appropriate choice.” The pound did collapse, and Ferguson cheered.

The final chapter is clearly Ferguson’s pitch to the talk shows and banks, which pay so generously to hear him speak. He describes America and China as two co-dependent economies, “Chimerica,” in which the Chinese pump money into America so it can buy Chinese goods. He warns, though, that we may now be seeing the deflation of a global “multi-decade super bubble” and offers three reasons. First, we overestimated our ability to calculate risk and underestimated the power of uncertainty. Second, we are human and consequently greedy and fallible. And third, the evolution of money is a messy business, with many victims alongside the fittest survivors. “As Joseph Schumpeter wrote more than seventy years ago, ‘this economic system cannot do without the ultima ratio of the complete destruction of those existences which are irretrievably associated with the hopelessly unadapted.’”

He attributes our surprise that such nasty things are happening to an ignorance of financial history, noting that “the average career of a Wall Street CEO is just over 25 years, which means that firsthand memories at the top of the U.S. banking system do not extend back beyond 1983—ten years after the beginning of the last great surge in oil and gold prices.”

What Ferguson fails to offer, however, is a convincing answer to how we can get out of our current morass. Are we simply to accept Schumpeter and watch the bodies pile up? Or should we return to Keynes and unleash the public finances on our present crisis? Should we favor more government control? Or do we take the more fatalist approach of Robert Merton, the Harvard economist who appears in Ferguson’s retelling of the collapse of the Long-Term Capital Management hedge fund, and accept that in an innovative, free-market economy, entrepreneurs will inevitably outpace regulators? Regulation is, by its very nature, backward looking.

In the end, Ferguson argues that financial markets are no more than a reflection of ourselves: it is no good blaming the mirror for our blemishes. This is feeble. It is akin to the ethically challenged CEO who says all he does is obey the law, when his own firms and lobbyists frame the law. Or blaming ordinary Russians for Stalin. Ferguson has clearly been spending too long in the company of hedge-fund managers if he believes this. The truth is that the financial system most accurately reflects the interests of its most involved participants: the financial services firms and the investment funds. Those of us who have a more fleeting involvement in finance—say when we buy a house, invest in a pension fund, or bail out Wall Street—take what is made available. We do not all share equal responsibility for what has gone wrong. ■

Philip Delves Broughton is the author of Ahead of the Curve: Two Years at Harvard Business School and a former New York and Paris correspondent for The Daily Telegraph.

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[*Forgotten Founder, Drunken Prophet: The Life of Luther Martin*, Bill Kauffman, 151 Books, 189 pages]

Drunk Without Power

By Jesse Walker

THERE IS A LEGEND many conservatives tell about the ways the Founding Fathers have been remembered. Once upon a time, the tale goes, historians gave the men who created this country the respect they deserve. Then hippie revisionists took over the academy, and now schoolchildren are indoctrinated with every unpleasant rumor and fact about the Founders that the tenured radicals can find.

This story has many holes, even when the subject is George Washington or Thomas Jefferson. But when it comes to Luther Martin, the long-winded Baltimore attorney who stood up for states' rights during the debates over the U.S. Constitution, the truth is almost exactly the opposite. For two centuries, Martin has been remembered, if he is recalled at all, for the unappealing rumors and facts that had attached themselves to him. Those unflattering portraits, which depicted the defender of decentralism as a prolix dipsomaniac who stood athwart the Constitutional Convention yelling "Stop!" were initially spread not by radical academics but by Martin's fellow Founders. Now the independent historian Bill Kauffman, who may not be a hippie but certainly is a revisionist, has rehabilitated Martin's reputation in an irreverent and enjoyable biography, *Forgotten Father, Drunken Prophet*. Martin may have been an alcoholic prone to rambling, Chavezesque speeches, Kauffman says, but he was also a prescient critic of the problems built into America's Constitution.

Martin was, in other words, an Antifederalist. And while there are Antifederalists who get decent press—

Patrick Henry, for example, who warned that "the republic may be lost forever" if the Constitution were ratified—the good things you hear about them rarely relate to their defense of the Articles of Confederation.

Kauffman, by contrast, appreciatively explains why the Antifederalists "objected to almost every feature of the Constitution. Anti-Federalists wanted annual elections. A larger House of Representatives whose members were paid by the states, not the central government, so that they did not forget on which side their bread was buttered. Rotation in office, or term limits. A Bill of Rights. Limitations on standing armies. No 'general welfare' clause. ... The Anti-Federalists stood for decentralism, local democracy, antimilitarism, and a deep suspicion of central governments."

They sound a lot like the hardcore constitutionalists of today, except that the Antis were so opposed to centralized authority that they aimed their fire at the Constitution itself, predicting many of the extensions of the federal government's authority that our current constitutionalists decry. As you would expect, they butted heads with the founding generation's most prominent champion of mercantilism and concentrated power, Alexander Hamilton—"the West Indian bastard," Kauffman calls him. But it is James Madison, a man beloved by modern Jeffersonians, who emerges as the surprise villain of the book.

"Against the Anti-Federalist conviction that a republic was suitable only for a small area in which the citizens could know and be known to one another," Kauffman writes, "James Madison asserted the superiority of sprawl." In *Federalist* 46, Madison declared that the "great interests of the nation have suffered on a hundred [occasions] from an undue attention to the local prejudices, interests, and views of the particular States." Kauffman's reply: "The United States thrive only if Maryland and Albany and the Berkshires, in their own particularized and unduplicable ways, thrive first."

Martin's role as a delegate to the

Constitutional Convention was to filibuster, to denounce, and ultimately to leak. On Nov. 29, 1787, in a speech to the Maryland legislature, Martin described the deliberations taking place in Philadelphia, breaking the informal code of silence that theoretically bound the conventioners. With conspiracy-fearing rhetoric that resembled the language that precipitated the Revolution, Martin accused the Federalist faction of plotting "to abolish and annihilate all State governments, and to bring forward one general government, over this extensive continent, of a monarchical nature." In that speech and in subsequent essays, he warned of the wars, tyranny, and taxes that the new system would enable, as well as (on a less libertarian note) pleading for preserving the individual states' ability to print paper money and impose trade barriers.

When it comes to Martin's comments at the convention itself, many historians have relied on a source who had an axe to grind: Madison, whose notes from the convention were published in 1840, four years after his death. But there were others scribbling in Philadelphia: John Lansing Jr. and Judge Robert Yates, Antifederalists from Kauffman's native upstate New York. Not surprisingly, Martin comes off better in their accounts, though even Yates complained that the Marylander's arguments were so "diffuse, and in many instances desultory, [that] it was not possible to trace him through the whole, or to methodize his ideas into a systematic or argumentative arrangement." Enemies and allies agree: Luther Martin could be a bore.

As we all know, Martin lost his fight. The Constitution was ratified, and for all its flaws the document does seem rather preferable to whatever it is that governs us now. You can thank the Antifederalists for that, too. They're the ones who ensured the covenant included a Bill of Rights. And it was their spirit—and in some cases their bodies—that animated the Whiskey Rebellion of 1791, a campaign of civil

disobedience that restrained the new regime's attempts to impose internal taxes. But if Martin was sometimes hyperbolic about the dangers of the new Constitution, his core critique holds. He certainly seems like a prophet today, when we live, in Kauffman's words, under "a powerful central state involved in perpetual warfare around the globe, a tax-gathering apparatus with its grip on every paycheck, states and localities reduced to mere administrative units." Modern America looks much more like Martin's warnings than Madison's promises.

Kauffman's account does not end with ratification. Martin lived another four decades, served twice as Maryland's attorney general, and before his death managed to make himself infamous a few more times. Most notably, he served as Aaron Burr's counsel when the former vice president was tried for treason. More obscurely—but characteristically—he got into a feud with a man who eloped with one of his daughters. He eventually turned his animus into a 163-page rant of a book that Kauffman describes as "tiresome, browbeating, nasty: Martin at his worst."

Kauffman doesn't flinch in offering this judgment. His aim is to rehabilitate Martin, not to prettify him. One of his most impressive feats is to make his subject sympathetic even after relating the ugliest moments of Martin's life. At the end, the attorney was a full-time drinker. (In one trial, a judge later recalled, Martin was "so drunk that the Court adjourned rather than let him attempt to conduct his case.") He finally subsisted on the dole, the state of Maryland levying a special tax on its lawyers to keep the now senile Founder in the black. By this time he had joined, of all things, the Federalist Party, though this did not reflect a philosophical conversion so much as his personal distaste for Thomas Jefferson.

Worst of all, the man who had called at the Constitutional Convention for an immediate ban on the importation of slaves, denouncing coerced servitude as "the only branch of commerce that is

unjustifiable in its nature," now defended the practice not just of slave-catching but of arresting any itinerant blacks on the presumption that they were runaway property. When policemen "meet with a negro or mulatto, whom they do not know to be free, and who has not such certificate of his freedom as the law requires," Martin wrote in 1810, they should "immediately take him as a runaway, and carry him before a justice of the peace." Not content merely to write on behalf of the cause, Martin offered free legal assistance to any officer who followed this advice. "There's not enough whitewash in the world to wipe Luther Martin clean for hagiography," Kauffman confesses.

Nonetheless, Martin was an essential figure in the early history of the Republic, and he deserves far better than the treatment he usually gets: forgotten by most of us, derided by most of the rest. The Antifederalist cause was a valiant attempt to preserve the revolutionary, decentralist, libertarian strains of the War of Independence, and Martin was, at his best, one of its most perspicacious figures.

Kauffman, in turn, is today one of the cause's most eloquent modern spokesmen. His short volume is not the most complete account of the Antifederalists' struggle—that honor probably belongs to Merrill Jensen's 1940 classic *The Articles of Confederation*—but it may be the most affecting take on the issue. By letting us into the mind of one flawed, fascinating, and ultimately tragic figure, Kauffman has not just reminded us that Luther Martin of Maryland deserves a place beside the other giants of the founding generation. He has made a compelling case for a disreputable but worthy movement, for the men so committed to what we now call constitutional principles that they refused to accept the Constitution itself. ■

Jesse Walker is the managing editor of Reason and author of Rebels on the Air: An Alternative History of Radio in America.

[*The Politics of Truth: Selected Writings of C. Wright Mills*, John H. Summers, ed., Oxford University Press, 320 pages]

American Dissenter

By David Brown

FOR NEARLY HALF A CENTURY, the essays of C. Wright Mills have fallen into oblivion. The author of nearly a dozen books, Mills's legacy rests largely on a provocative trilogy that coolly dissected complacent postwar liberalism. *White Collar* (1951), *The Power Elite* (1956) and *The Sociological Imagination* (1959) elbowed their way into the social-scientific cannon. They were counter-revolutionary texts, which panned the welfare-warfare state's triumph over romantic producer radicalism. Today, they constitute the centerpiece of their author's celebrity. Yet Mills's opposition took many forms and strangely no omnibus of his essays, reviews, or interviews has appeared since the Kennedy presidency—until now.

Mills was hostile to the liberal internationalism that underwrote the "American Century." He belonged to a distinguished cross-generational strain of dissenting scholars. Among their ranks were Thorstein Veblen, Charles Beard, and William Appleman Williams, Midwesterners who embraced variations of a political discontent rooted in organic and tradition-based criticisms of capitalism. Mills shared their sense of occupational alienation. As a Texan armed with a University of Wisconsin Ph.D.—earned under the distinguished émigré scholar Hans Gerth—he made an uneasy academic home at Columbia University. From his West Nyack residence, Mills donned motorcycle leather and pointed his BMW bike toward "enemy" territory—Columbia's sociology department. He charged the university's influential troika, Robert Merton, Paul Lazarsfeld, and Daniel Bell, with

“abstract empiricism” for diluting the radical uses of social theorizing through quantification and statistical analysis. Their work, he argued, conformed to the defensive worldview that dominated historical writing, politics, and literary thought, and left little conversational space for the debates on race, war, and reform that would shake the 1960s. Somehow, though, culture seemed in a sense to be moving to Columbia’s tune. Bell’s *The End of Ideology*, Lionel Trilling’s *The Liberal Imagination*, and Richard Hofstadter’s *The American Political Tradition* epitomized the sort of big-idea books that appealed to the conservative mood in the postwar period.

Collectively, these studies made the case for a new politics. The big-state sensibility of the 1930s had merged with the “arsenal of democracy” faith of the 1940s to overtake the old pre-Depression Republic. While the New Deal philosophy ruled the nation’s political roost from FDR’s 1932 election till its 1968 crack-up, Mills never made his peace with its consensus. Its reliance on Keynesian economics at home and the containment of Soviet ambitions abroad triggered, he insisted, a centralization of society predicated on military expansion, corporate control, and the narrowing of political pluralism. This “power elite,” he had little doubt, threatened democracy in America.

At heart, Mills was asking a big question: what was the purpose of knowledge? From there he began to conceive of sociology as a model for human liberation, one that could reveal hidden social structures, agendas, and thought. As the essays in this collection make clear, he recognized the difficulty of his endeavor. Large bureaucratic systems, after all, were on the rise—society threatened to overwhelm self. The churches tolerated the nation’s declared and undeclared wars; the universities dutifully marched behind Big Science; and IBM—or was it General Motors?—fashioned the culture’s model for efficiency. In response, Mills posited a radicalism selectively informed by both the

populism that had once swept his native Texas and the more recent leftism of the 1930s. A resourceful intellectual street-fighter, Mills wrote from the contours of a classical native protest tradition in a country that prized the ideological center.

His essays, linked by their low opinion of mass society and rejection of American globalism, cover a critical period in liberalism’s mid-century ascendancy. Penned between 1944 and 1960, they address the impact of decolonization and suburbanization, the vogue of Third World Marxism, and the menace of the military-industrial complex. Their author, congenitally suspicious of power, never trusted Goliath. In “Listen, Yankee! The Cuban Case Against the U.S.” and “On Latin America, the Left, and the U.S.” Mills denounces his country’s quest for hemispheric dominance. Anticipating the fierce resistance to nation-building that later informed a generation of nationalist movements in Vietnam, Cambodia, and Iran, he stares down both foreign-policy realists and liberal internationalists with a menacing prophecy that rings true today: “You can’t buy off revolutions with \$500 million of aid.”

Many of these essays, aside from providing a useful frame of reference to

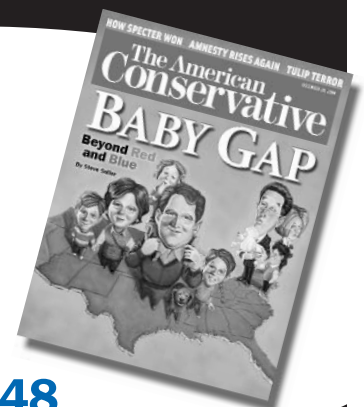
Mills’s emergence as an important public thinker, retain their capacity to inform, instruct, and occasionally even incite. Their author had, after all, perfected the pose and prose of intellectual provocateur. In a sharp 1958 address, “A Pagan Sermon to the Christian Clergy,” Mills scolds United Church of Canada officials for meekly acquiescing to the death-rattling nuclear brinkmanship of the day. “Do not these times demand a little Puritan defiance?” he asks, channeling his best Jonathan Edwards: “Do not they demand the realization of how close hell is to being a sudden and violent reality of man’s world today?” Four years later came the Cuban Missile Crisis.

Mills argued that the waning of the once resonant American dissenting-class went a long way toward explaining the problems that haunted his country. Rather than operating as independent critics, the “eggheads” had become increasingly entangled in a “cultural apparatus” that pressured mind to serve power. He urged “research man” to form an alliance with another marginalized group—organized labor. Absent the cream of their intellectual capital, the corporations, Mills believed, would have to contend with a revitalized radicalism of head and heart.

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Collectively, the essays in this anthology have much to tell us about the way knowledge becomes the handmaiden of social desires and social corruption. There isn't a false note in the bunch and a small number—including a shrewd appraisal of Veblen's still resonant *The Theory of the Leisure Class*—approximate genius. When Mills writes, "Veblen's books as a whole ... constitute a work of art, as well as a full-scale commentary on American life," he offers a critical summation that could equally be applied to his own scholarship. One wonders why it has taken so long for a publisher to revisit these articles. Thanks go to John H. Summers, author of a forthcoming Mills biography, for guiding this project through to publication.

Interested readers might also profitably turn their attention to *C. Wright Mills: Letters and Autobiographical Writings* (2000). A revealing peek into Mills's personal as well as professional preoccupations, it complements *The Politics of Truth*. Together, these books make the case for Mills's inclusion in the pantheon of postwar thinkers.

In both studies, one is struck not merely by the agility of Mills's mind, but the "Americanness" of his voice and the cultural angle of his criticism. The prose is by turns muscular, playfully aggressive, and powerful enough to draw the occasional drop of blood. New and suggestive phrases, such as the epigrammatic "Take it big," the cutting "crackpot realism," or the Strangelovian "executives of the mind," take on lives of their own. In Mills's hand, high- and lowbrow language collide to create a social scientific vocabulary for a world beyond the academy. While his contemporaries discovered, in the theoretical framework advanced by the Frankfurt School a set of ideas with which they could attack their nation's tilt toward kitsch, conformity, and "anti-intellectualism"—shorthand for the crypto-anti-Semitism they detected in McCarthyism—Mills remained committed to a plain and progressive style. He produced accessible sociology in support of the Wobbly

Shop. He left the musty academic journals to the musty academics.

Some nemeses regarded Mills as a curiosity—a cowboy/professor, a hick from the sticks circulating among Manhattan's rarefied (and incestuous) intellectual circles. And yet his American perspective was broader than that of a good number of his critics. Unlike many in the West Side Kibbutz that dominated social-scientific discourse at Columbia, Mills traveled widely. He lived, studied, and worked in the Southwest, the Chesapeake region, the Midwest, and the Northeast. Treating his life as a creative process, this "cosmopolitan Texan" took the measure of liberalism at home and wanted to see what the rest of the world had to offer. He lectured in Mexico and spent time in Cuba and the Soviet Union. "I wish to God I could get real information about China," he once lamented of that closed country.

Standing outside the postwar consensus, Mills embraced the role of oppositionist. Having made no investment in the communism of the 1930s or the liberalism of the 1950s, he was free to reject both the old *laissez faire* and the new planed economies then emerging in the West. For this resistance, Mills became an icon for a rising generation of young leftists and an iconoclast to an academy that knew not quite what to make of him. Here was a sociologist who didn't much like academic sociology; an intellectual who didn't much like intellectuals.

Dead at 45, Mills never lived to see the New Deal in eclipse or the Sun Belt conservatism that replaced it. We can only imagine what he would have made of Watergate, Reaganism, and the "cultural apparatus" that has sustained the nation's crusader internationalism through two Middle Eastern wars. No doubt this is our loss. ■

David Brown is author of Richard Hofstadter: An Intellectual Biography and the forthcoming Beyond the Frontier: The Midwestern Voice in American Historical Writing. He teaches at Elizabethtown College, Pennsylvania.

Mike Judge

Continued from page 27

employs deceptively broad, overtly commercial comedy as a framework for incisive critiques of the intense commodification of modern life. Throughout the Judge *oeuvre*, corporations and government conspire to dumb people down, to keep them mired in unblinking consumerism, to divest them from their natural selves. His protagonists, in light of the existential struggles they face, often seem not heroic so much as Sisyphean hard-luck figures.

It's not yet clear how this thematic tendency will play out in Judge's next project, "The Goode Family," due to launch in March 2009 on ABC. Unlike "King of the Hill," which took aim at small-town culture, "The Goode Family" is a send up of do-gooder white liberal types who shop exclusively at Whole Foods and take Obama's quasi-inspirational rhetoric at face value. The preview available at press time introduces characters like a vegan woman clad in a t-shirt emblazoned with the "Meat is Murder" slogan; a chunky Caucasoid lad—adopted from South Africa because the family apparently wanted a black child—clad in a dashiki and a Mother Africa necklace; and a starved vegan dog. The patriarch of the family, a community-college administrator, is described as "coming from a long line of overeducated liberals." Judge says that the Goodes are people who "feel forever guilty about being a human being on the planet."

In this insipid era of Yes We Did, with the mainstream media pushing a postracial construction of America, the time is right for skewering the white liberals we all know too well. The open question about Judge's new show isn't whether the artist is up to the task, but whether his new network will let Judge be Judge or try to shoehorn him into an ungainly box that offers neither commercial success nor critical kudos. ■

A.G. Gancarski writes from Jacksonville, Fla.

Deep Thoughts

Indeed the world is too much with us, late and soon. There are things other than elections and recessions, maybe things even more important, certainly things

that have been around longer than we have or will be.

Some years back, I was on a scuba trip to the Caribbean with Capital Divers, my then dive club out of Washington. I forget just where we were. We made these trips annually for several years and they blur together. The club usually chartered one of those 125-foot specialized dive boats. We spent most of our time underwater. Dive, burgers, beer, sleep, dive. Bright sun, blue water, explosion of bubbles as you stepped off the dive deck and finned at ten feet to the anchor line.

One day we swam along a deep wall at 120 feet, maybe 15 of us, the sea dropping to blue-black night and the wall colorless in the crepuscular dimness of depth. It was deeper than a basic instructor would recommend, but Cap Divers was a bit of a cowboy outfit and everyone was experienced. Curling misshapen growths projected from the rock like tangled ropes and distorted cups from some nightmarish basement. The only sounds were the slow sssssss-wubbawubba of breath and exhaust and the locationless clicking of arthropods.

A curious relaxation comes over you at such times: a sense of not mattering at all to the sea, of the world as a bigger and older place than Washington or even New York, of detachment from the fizzing little wars of columnists and polls and polls. A salubrious triviality. If I could bottle the feeling, drug markets would wither overnight.

Those droning nature shows on television say that the ocean is hostile to

man. I think it is not, though it is a bad place to make mistakes. The ocean is a huge, huge world that doesn't care about us, isn't interested, has other things to do. You see documentaries that try to make sharks sound dreadful. In fact they do not seem to regard a weird humpbacked creature with one big eye and emitting bubbles as appetizing. Few creatures underwater are aggressive toward people. Odd things swim, or flap, or drift by, usually paying no attention. They have their agendas, and we have ours.

PEOPLE CALL THEM OCEANIC BATS, OR FLYING BATHMATS, BUT THESE DESCRIPTIONS DON'T CATCH THE SMOOTH, RIPPLING, FLEXING FLAP OF SOFT CHILLY FLESH.

You can wonder what God or Darwin had in mind. Whatever goes on at corporate, it is well above our pay grade. I forget with whom I was buddied up, but she stopped and hung with her mask over a big barrel sponge. A small diver could crawl into some of these things. She motioned me over. In the glow of dive lights, I saw a bright red arrow crab sheltering. At that depth a dive light makes everything it touches burst into color as if you were throwing paint at it.

The beastie was built like an aspirin tablet with great long jointed legs, a daddy longlegs of the ocean. It stalked slowly about, puzzled by our lights I suppose. I wondered what it thought it was doing or we were doing.

The sea is a dead world, though living. In a forest you can imagine communing

with the deer or squirrels or having a pet bird sit on your shoulder. The land is our world. The sea isn't. Fish swim slowly by, eyes cold and devoid of thought, of anything we would recognize. For untold millions of years they have done this. I do not think that even a renegotiation of NAFTA could change it.

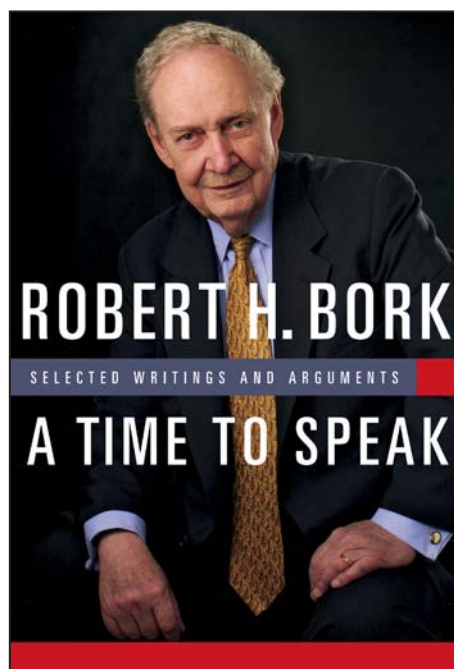
Below a hundred feet you don't have much time before your computer squeaks warnings about going into decompression tables. We were starting to drift upward when they came by, three of them: big rays, flying in formation. Their wingspan may have been four feet. It is hard to tell with the magnifying effect of water. People call them oceanic bats, or flying bathmats, but these descriptions don't catch the

smooth, rippling, flexing flap of soft chilly flesh.

I cannot explain how anything so ugly can be so lovely, but they manage it. I have heard them called devil fish by people of the surface, but they are as ominous as potatoes. They passed us, graceful, fast, as if going somewhere with a purpose in mind. And disappeared. I felt like a mouse in a computer room: something was going on, but it wasn't my business.

We had all seen rays before, but this was prettier, a privilege, and we knew it. We stared—programmers, GS-14's, journalists, graduate students, all the detritus of Washington—and resumed the ascent. Our computers were becoming importunate, and one does not ignore computers. ■

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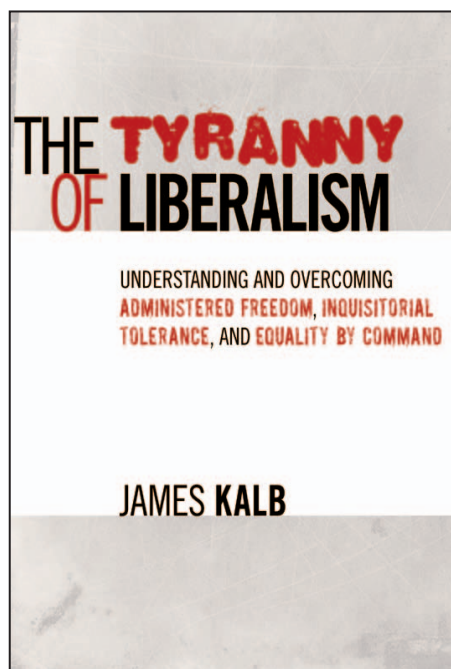
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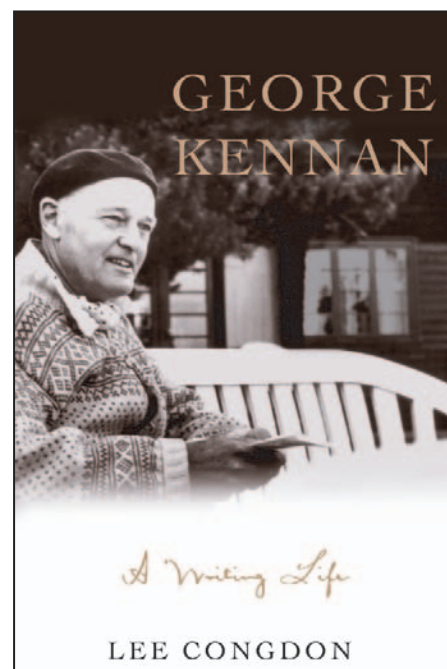
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